

POOR MAN'S SILVER? THE ROLE OF PEWTER IN ROMAN BRITAIN: A COLLECTION IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM

by *Lindsey Smith*

Pewter vessels are a class of Roman artefact for which Britain is well known, but do we really understand what they were for and how they were used? The author, based at Reading University and the British Museum, describes her on-going research.

Around 600 pewter vessels have been recovered from Roman Britain to date through a mixture of chance antiquarian discoveries, archaeologically excavated material and metal detected finds, with variable degrees of associated contextual information.¹ This article will introduce on-going research into the substantial collection of Romano-British pewter vessels housed in the British Museum. The museum's collection has been growing since 1844 and contains 106 vessels, consisting of bowls, dishes, plates, platters, cups and flagons. This is the first time they have been systematically researched. A closer inspection of the individual objects offers the opportunity to recognise a little more of their use and function and to understand the relationships people had with pewter in Britain in the Roman period.

Pewter vessels were particularly favoured in Roman Britain, with just a small number known from the continent, mostly from burials in the Netherlands, Belgium and France.² The majority of British finds come from south-east of the Fosse Way³ with concentrations around the Mendip Hills, Somerset, in an area thought to be the main production centre⁴ and the East Anglian Fenlands. The emergence of the pewter industry is difficult to date due to the durable nature of the material, which, because it does

not break easily and could be simply repaired, often had a long lifespan. It is conceivable that pewter was being manufactured throughout the Roman period with a peak in deposition (and probably production), in the late Roman period. The majority of pewter vessels have been recovered from late Roman hoards dating to the later third and fourth centuries. The shapes and forms of a bowl and several plates and spoons purporting to be made from pewter and recovered from the stream bed of the Walbrook, London, suggest an earlier production date in the mid-first century.⁵ However, X-ray fluorescence analysis demonstrates that the bowl and plates were actually made of tin or lead.⁶ Whilst this challenges the theory that pewter-ware was manufactured in London before the mid-third century, it does suggest that a tin industry existed in the Walbrook area until around 155,⁷ producing tableware items that were later copied in pewter.

Pewter use

A common interpretation of Roman pewter vessels is that they were functional, utilitarian pieces which served as the typical dining accoutrements of wealthy villa owners of the third and fourth centuries, as in the example of the Appleford hoard (Berks. now Oxon.) (Fig. 1),⁸ being a 'cheap substitute for costly silver'.⁹ Certainly the shapes and detailing of some vessels in the collection match contemporary shapes in silver and bronze from the first to the third centuries. For example, a pewter platter from Coldham Common (Cambs.) closely resembles the large silver dish from the Mildenhall (Suffolk) Treasure.¹⁰



Fig. 1. Central decorative roundel (diam. 11.2 cm) made with a chisel-ended punch on a pewter platter from the Appleford Hoard, Oxfordshire. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

Photo: © Grahame Soffe.

Although not so elaborately designed with the beaded rim or chased pattern, there are similar characteristics – the wide rim and perhaps the concentric lathe marks running from the centre were intentionally left as a decorative feature. The square pewter dish from Icklingham, Suffolk, is a form similar to the silver Mileham (Norfolk) Dish and displays the same beaded edge (punched *pontille* from the underside) and central chuck, but with less decoration.¹¹ These large square or rectangular silver platters became popular in the fourth century. The distribution of pewter vessels also tends to support this idea, with the majority of finds appearing in what is generally termed the civil zone of Roman Britain, south-east of the Fosse Way.

There are vessels in the British Museum collection interpreted as tableware, bearing graffiti which may refer to personal ownership.

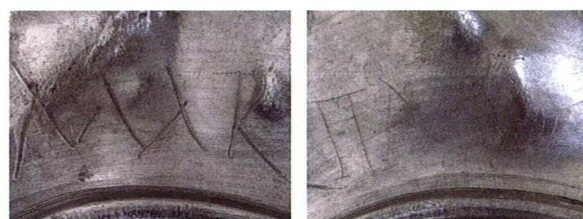


Fig. 2. Detail of inscription with the name 'MARTINUS' on pewter plates from Southwark, London.

Photo: © Lindsey Smith.

Individual names may associate individual pieces with an owner or successive owners. Two plates in the collection, recovered from the Thames at Southwark, London, in 1869 bear the graffito *Martinus*, which may indicate the plates were his property.¹² What is also evident is that MARTINUS appears in two distinct scripts. The MAR is clear and boldly incised whereas the *tinus* is more lightly inscribed and is not so neat (Fig. 2). It is not always names that we find inscribed on vessels. A number of vessels in the collection have been observed inscribed with motifs or symbols. A fluted silver bowl from the Mildenhall Treasure¹³ has an interlocking triangle or six-pointed star motif in the central roundel. We also find a similar five-pointed star motif, much less competently inscribed, on the underside of a flanged bowl from Lakenheath, Suffolk¹⁴ (Fig. 3). The meaning of this motif is not understood; it may be nothing more than a decorative feature or ownership mark. Of interest in this study is the location of motifs and inscriptions found on Romano-British pewter. Graffiti referring to what may be personal ownership is frequently observed on the outside of pewter vessels whilst the ambiguous motifs and symbols tend to be inscribed on the underside of the object. For example, in the case



Fig. 3. Left: Decoration of interlocking triangles on the circular central panel of the fluted silver bowl with handles, Mildenhall Treasure (diam. of bowl: 40.8 cm).

Photo: © Trustees of the British Museum.

Right: Interlocking triangles within the footring of a pewter bowl from Lakenheath (BM 1871.0704.8).

Drawing by Craig Williams, © Trustees of the British Museum.

above, the star motif on the Lakenheath bowl would clearly be hidden from normal view in contrast to the Mildenhall star, which is integral with the chased decoration on the inside. Had someone seen the motif on the Mildenhall dish and inscribed it as a graffito on the base of their bowl – but why not on the inside of the bowl? Graffiti and inscriptions on the Roman pewter in the collection are providing the opportunity to discuss issues of literacy, early iconography and epigraphy. I will return to the issues of symbols and iconography below.

Pewter function

Although antiquarian accounts of pewter vessels in county journals note size, weight and forms of objects, none pay much attention to scratches and markings. Borrowing a technique used in studies of samian ware, a number of pewter vessels can be observed to carry incisions or abrasions suggestive of how vessels were used prior to deposition.¹⁵ It will always be difficult to assign ‘scars of use’ to physical actions in antiquity, particularly in distinguishing between scars left by secular activity compared with those that might have a votive origin. Of the 106 vessels in the collection, 74 (69%) display scars of use and of these 62% have been classed as resulting from utilitarian, mundane actions. 21% are identified as bearing scars that would not have resulted from daily actions and are thus

classified as ‘intentionally mutilated’. A further 31% display both classes of scars. A number of bowls and dishes in the collection display patches of abrasion within their bases which would be consistent with their contents being repeatedly stirred. *Mulsum*, a drink made with heated honey added to wine¹⁶ may well have been poured and mixed in pewter cups and bowls. Traces of wear are noticeable on many of the bowls of the silver spoons from the Thetford (Norfolk) Treasure,¹⁷ and perhaps these were used to stir liquids or the contents of such bowls. Similarly, a number of the flat-wares in the collection show signs of light scratches or knife nicks indicating that fruit, vegetables, cheeses, breads and meats were sliced on the surface of the pewter before decanting into smaller bowls or dishes.

In the ‘intentionally mutilated’ category, there are a number of vessels that bear stab or puncture wounds that would render them useless in terms of their original function and perhaps these are votive offerings that have been ‘ritually killed’. Beyond the British Museum collection, Roman ceramic and pewter vessels display ‘secular’ holes that can be attributed to functional use. For example, ceramic vessels with a number of holes in the bases have been defined as cheese presses, strainers, flower pots, timing devices and money boxes. However, these holes are of a regular nature, they were made at the time of manufacture and none match the scars on the British Museum pewter, which suggest votive activity undertaken later. A plate from Lakenheath in the collection¹⁸ has 67 puncture wounds rendered by two knives or daggers. The back-to-front cuts were made with a large blade, probably 3 cm across, compared with the front-to-back cuts produced by a smaller blade, perhaps 1 cm wide (Fig. 4). Similarly, a second plate in the collection, also from Lakenheath¹⁹ (on the right of Fig. 5), has one stab mark and several dents. The plate



Fig. 4. Lakenheath pewter platter with multiple stab wounds.

Photo: © Lindsey Smith.



Fig. 5. Left: Bent and stabbed pewter plate from Icklingham.

Right: Multiple dents and single piercing to the Lakenheath pewter platter.

Photos: © Lindsey Smith.

shown on the left in Fig. 5, from Icklingham,²⁰ has a number of knife cuts and a more rounded stab wound. The rim has also been turned up. Is this a deliberate votive act or are we seeing a more secular activity such as damaged plates being gathered together for re-cycling?

The 'ritual killing' of objects as sacrificial or votive offerings is well attested in Roman Britain. For example, smashed pots, deliberately mutilated coins and miniature implements and tools, and bent weapons have been recovered from a number of temple deposits such as at Uley (Gloucs.), *Verulamium* (Herts.) and Woodeaton (Oxon.).²¹ At Silchester (Hants.), a pewter flagon pierced by a circular hole just above the base was recovered from a well shaft that had been sealed by an ogham-inscribed baluster stone column. The hole has been interpreted as deliberate, rendering the vessel useless in terms of its perceived function as a container for liquids.²² It is possible that, as with Iron Age and Romano-British pottery, the British Museum pewter vessels were 'killed' as part of an act of ritual deposition.²³ The motivation for the manufacture and subsequent damage of the pewter plates is certainly worthy of further investigation.

Religious association?

A number of vessels in the collection bear the *Chi-Rho* monogram, a symbol used by early Christians – formed by the combination of the Greek capital letters which begin the title *Christos*, Latin *Christus*, 'The

Anointed One'.

The monogram is also known from silver plate hoards such as the Mildenhall and Water Newton Treasures. It is not inconceivable that the large pewter platters may have been used in ceremonial feasting.²⁴ These vessels may also have been donated to the Church or individual churches as liturgical plate where pewter was used instead of more costly silver, thus allowing less prosperous Romano-British Christian congregations to participate in the liturgy of the Mass.²⁵ As with the motifs, of key importance in this study is the location of the graffiti or decoration on the vessels and whether this may be significant. For example, was the inscription on open display²⁶ or hidden from sight under the rim?²⁷ (Fig. 6). Were names or motifs hidden if food or offerings were placed within the vessel?

In addition to motifs and inscriptions indicating a religious nature for the pewter vessels in the collection, we also have a

specific form of pedestal bowl worthy of consideration. The British Museum has five octagonal-flanged bowls, four from Icklingham and one from Cornwall. The octagonal form may have been favoured as the pointed flange aids holding, especially if the bowl contained hot liquids. It is conceivable therefore, that this form of bowl was regarded as a secular dining vessel that served no exceptional purpose. However, whilst silver bowls of the third and fourth centuries are dominated by rounded flanges,²⁸ only octagonal pewter bowls have been noted.²⁹ This suggests that pewter may have been a material particularly favoured for the production of octagonal bowls for a specific function. Other examples are known from Appleford (Oxon. formerly Berks.), Bath, Meare (Somerset), Hacheston (Suffolk), Great Dunmow (Essex), Welney (Norfolk), Stonea (Cambs.), and Manton (Lincs.).³⁰

The octagonal form has also

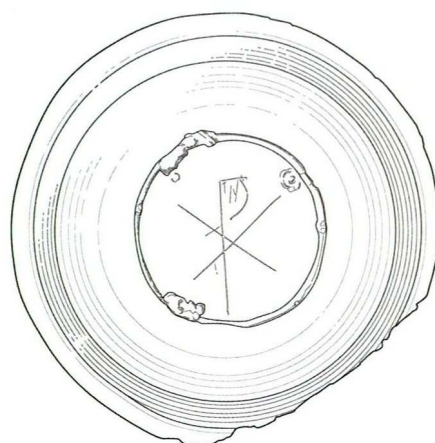


Fig. 6. Left: Pewter dish from Appleshaw incised with the Chi-Rho monogram within the footring.

Right: Pewter platter from *Verulamium* bearing the hidden Chi-Rho within the roundel decorative panel. Drawings by Stephen Crummy, © Trustees of the British Museum.



been discussed in relation to the Christian liturgy of baptism. The number eight is particularly revered in the Old Testament. This states that after the Creation, God rested 'on the seventh day' and the eighth represented the New Creation or the re-birth of the world through the Resurrection of Christ.³¹ The symbolism of the re-birth of the world is a theme that continues in Christian ideology centred around the ritual of baptism where the baptismal candidate co-resurrects with Christ, who was raised from the dead on the eighth and first day of a new week.³² It was therefore through the baptism ritual and the inner significance of numbers, that the octagonal form may have come to serve a visual purpose. We need to bear in mind that Icklingham is likely to have been a place of Christian focus. The site has produced a probable Christian church and baptistery,³³ and four lead tanks, three of which bear *Chi-Rho* inscriptions leading to their interpretation as portable baptismal fonts.³⁴ It is possible that celebrants would be reminded of the sacred ritual of baptism if the vessel containing the holy water acquired a peculiar sanctity through its octagonal form. This supports the idea that octagonal pewter bowls could have substituted as portable fonts.³⁵

Distribution of Roman pewter

As previously noted, the majority of pewter vessels have been recovered from areas south-east of the Fosse Way with concentrations of finds near the Mendip Hills and the East Anglian Fens. The density of pewter finds in the south-west is thought to reflect the proximity of production centres and their proximity to the sources of raw materials, tin from Cornwall and Devon and lead from the Mendip Hills.³⁶ Vessel moulds excavated from archaeological sites predominantly come from villas such as Nettleton (Wilts.) and Lansdown (Gloucs.),³⁷ or from urban workshops such as at

Silchester³⁸ and London. Despite more intimate contextual information being lost for the majority of the pewter vessels in the British Museum collection, many of the pewter hoards from elsewhere appear to have been purposely buried for safe-keeping and later retrieval, such as the hoards found at or near villa sites. The Appleshaw (Hants.) hoard was recovered from a hole dug through the cement floor of a room in the villa house, and a similar hoard of pewter vessels from Bardwell (Suffolk) was found close to the villa at Stanton Chair.³⁹ These vessels had been stacked, separated by layers of long narrow leaves. Other pewter vessels are known from villa sites at Brislington (near Bristol) (Fig. 7), Box (Wilts.), Little Oakley (Essex), Rivenhall (Essex), Godmanchester (Hunts.), Tottenhoe (Beds.) and Wilbraham (Cambs.). However, this does not account for the high density of vessels being recovered from areas not associated with a dense distribution of villas or urban markets, such as East Anglia. A large number of vessels have been recovered from watery places like rivers, bogs and wells where retrieval would be hindered. Watery locations appear to have been the focus of religious activity, evidenced by the votive material associated with them, rather than convenient places to dispose of unwanted objects. The deliberate act of depositing precious metalwork, such as weaponry, in wet places, goes back at least to the Bronze Age. Pewter vessels from outside the collection have been recovered from a number of riverine contexts: five pewter plates came from the Thames at Shepperton, far from the nearest settlement,⁴⁰ two pewter vessels were discovered in a former river bed at Welney (Cambs.),⁴¹

and a number of vessels have been recorded from the sacred spring at the Temple of Sulis Minerva at Bath.⁴² Even the carefully packed hoard of pewter dishes from the Bardwell villa, mentioned above, were found in waterlogged marshy ground, close to a tributary of the River Thet.⁴³ These watery finds support the claim that pewter vessels from these sites should be regarded as votive deposits.⁴⁴ Pits and wells, of course, served for the disposal of rubbish or supplies, but it has long been recognised that they also served as receptacles for votive deposits and may have contained both ritual material and rubbish.⁴⁵ The contents of a well-shaft might consist of votive offerings at the bottom, rubbish in between, and more ritual material at the top in a 'termination phase'.⁴⁶ The Appleford hoard had been deposited in a well with overtly ritual material such as iron tools, an iron cauldron chain and organic remains, including leather.⁴⁷ The Moorfields (London) flagon⁴⁸ in the British Museum, was recovered from a well, and other pewter flagons have been recorded from wells at Caerwent, Dragonby (Lincs.), Chew Park (Somerset), Brislington (Fig. 7), Winchester and Silchester.⁴⁹ This accumulation of evidence suggests that pewter vessels deposited in watery places had become, like the long tradition of other classes of material, votive offerings.⁵⁰



Fig. 7. Three of the seven pewter flagons from the well of the Brislington villa (height of largest flagon: 30 cm).

Photo: © Grahame Soffe.

There is the possibility that vessels in such circumstances contained food offerings, although we have no way of knowing this.

Scientific analysis

Ancient pewter is generally recognised as an alloy of two elemental metals, tin and lead, but the proportion of each of these can vary considerably in any pewter object, and, of course, traces of other elements can be detected in varying degrees through modern analysis.⁵¹ In his *Natural History* the first-century Roman author Pliny the Elder discusses the value and uses of different tin-lead alloys,⁵² particularly in relation to soldering and plating. He and other Roman writers use the term *stagnum* in referring to vessels made from a silver-lead alloy, or tin, or a tin alloy. Another term, *tertiarium*, probably refers to an alloy of approximately one part tin to two parts lead, used in soldering pipes, and *argentarium* 'silver mixture', is probably an alloy of greater tin content, about one part tin to one part lead. Modern analysis since the 1890s has suggested that Romano-British pewter can be divided into three broad categories. Firstly, the smallest vessels, often the most intricately produced with body fluting and incised decoration, appear to be composed of almost pure tin. Thus, the alloy represents a particular manufacturing process deliberately chosen to improve the casting and the finished surface of the vessel. Secondly, large vessels, such as platters and fish-dishes, needing a shorter solidification time in their manufacture, have a much higher lead content, about three parts tin to one part lead. Lastly, high lead alloys, about one part tin to one part lead, were specifically chosen for low status objects such as lamp fillers.

Twenty-nine vessels in the British Museum collection have recently been subjected to X-ray fluorescence analysis. The preliminary results are encouraging and appear to confirm the early results that

the eutectic point of tin-lead alloys is a major factor in defining the best casting properties for the different classes of Romano-British pewter vessels.

Conclusion

It is regrettable that the date of production, identity of the donors and in some cases the burial contexts of the pewter hoards in the British Museum collection, will never be known. However, this brief review of Romano-British pewter vessels has shown that their traditional interpretation as a tableware is perhaps too simplistic, especially given that pewter is a soft alloy that does not lend itself for use at the table. Instead, pewter vessels seem to have carried far greater social and religious significance. Through re-examination of the vessels in the British Museum collection, recording vessel shape and form, wear marks and inscriptions, new information is revealed which can be compared with pewter data from elsewhere, and contemporary artefacts in metal, ceramic and glass, across regions. Ultimately, it is hoped that studies of this kind will provide a stimulus for wider debates concerning how, even from the British Museum's most familiar objects, new information can be revealed.



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FOOTNOTES

Website: http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/research_projects/pewter_hoards.aspx

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ROMAN BULGARIA

by Grahame Soffe

In April 2008 the ARA undertook an ambitious and unique tour of Roman archaeology in Bulgaria. The tour was initially devised at the suggestion of the late Dr Vivien Swan in discussion with ARA board members, particularly Dr David Evans and Don Greenwood. The project developed further from Professor Andrew Poulter's presentation on *Roman Bulgaria* at the ARA's AGM and Symposium in November 2005 in his capacity as Professor of Roman Archaeology and Chair of Late Roman and Early Byzantine Archaeology at the University of Nottingham, and Director of the British Archaeological Expedition to Bulgaria II. Andrew Poulter has become the leading British authority on the Roman and Byzantine archaeology of Bulgaria, after being initially encouraged to study the region by his professor, John Wilkes, now Hon. President of the ARA. After arrangements by David Evans and the preparation of the ARA guidebook by Vix Hughes (both of the ARA), the tour was led by Andrew Poulter assisted by Grahame Soffe of the ARA. Travel and accommodation arrangements were made by Boyan Stoev and his staff at Magic Tours (London and Sofia) and the 36 group members were also accompanied by Maria Radenkova who acted as courier on behalf of Magic Tours. The coach driver for the whole tour was Todor Todur. The flight to Sofia from Heathrow Airport Terminal 5 unfortunately coincided with the mounting crisis accompanying the opening of the new terminal, but difficulties were kept to a minimum. The tour included a large variety of archaeological sites dating from the Thracian to the Byzantine period, and at many sites it was arranged that Bulgarian expert archaeologists were on hand to provide supplementary guidance. The tour was preceded in May 2007 by an important visit and workshop held on the Lower Danubian *limes* at the legionary fortress of *Novae* (see below) (Breeze and Jilek 2008; Dyczek 2008) and the session on Roman Bulgaria at the biennial International Roman Archaeology Conference held at University

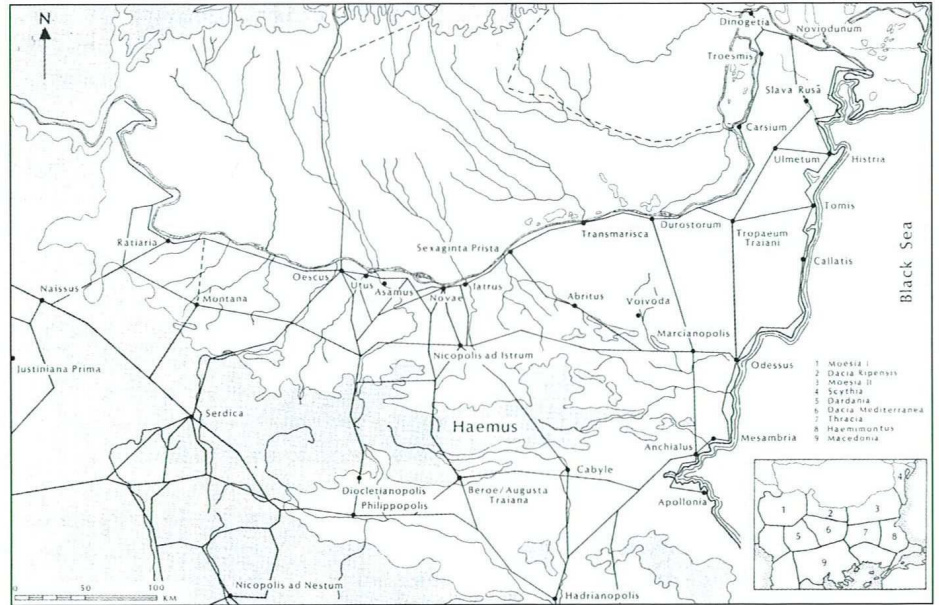


Fig. 1. Bulgaria and the Lower Danube in the late Roman period.

Courtesy of Andrew Poulter.

College London in March 2007, since published (Haynes (ed.) 2011). The tour also made a significant contribution to international dialogue between British and Bulgarian archaeologists concerned with classical antiquity and so the following account goes into more detail than in the descriptions of subsequent 2008-10 events. It is worth noting that *Bulgaria in Antiquity* (Hoddinott 1975) still provides a good introduction to an important and fascinating part of the Roman world not as well known to British Romanists as it should be. The map (Fig. 1) shows the location of the major sites in the late Roman period.

Philippopolis (Plovdiv)

Initially, the group made its way to Plovdiv (the Greco-Roman city of *Philippopolis/Trimontium*). The city lies on the Thracian Plain and the group were based at Hotel Bulgaria in the centre of the Roman and modern city – the walls of Marcus Aurelius, 3.5km long, enclosed nearly 80 hectares. The life of *Philippopolis* is beautifully described in the dialogue, *The Runaways*, written by Lucian in AD 166-7. Opportunities for excavation in the area of Roman occupation have been minimal until recently, when the *agora* area has been located. The tour included the *agora* where the recent excavations were described by Dr Ivo Topalilov, Plovdiv Municipal

Archaeologist (now Associate Prof. at Shumen University), who met the group on site. The group also examined the subterranean remains of the stadium, later moving on to the fine town house known as the 'EIPHNH building' with mosaics and the display of inscriptions, all now displayed below modern ground level in the Tsar Boris III Boulevard shopping centre. The city was extensively developed under Hadrian, when the marble stadium replaced an earlier structure. It is 250m long and 70m wide, situated between two of the hills of the city enabling the slopes to be used for seating up to 30,000 spectators. The entrance at the southern end was an ornate edifice with Corinthian



Fig. 2. Plovdiv (Philippopolis/Trimontium): Stadium or circus, north end of the arena, 70m wide, with marble seating showing sculptured 'legs' and a vaulted and arched main(?) entrance. Fragment of architrave with motifs of *bucrania* linked by garlands, interspersed with masks and rosettes. Photo: © Grahame Soffe.

columns, *aediculae*, and five arched doorways between piers with relief herms. Architraves were decorated with *bucrania*, a fragment of which can be seen at the exposed northern end of the stadium (Fig. 2). In 1983-4 during rescue excavations prior to reconstruction of the modern shopping centre mentioned above, near the southern foot of the Three Hills, part of a large town house with a courtyard and fine mosaics was investigated, although an excavation of the whole house was not possible (Bospachieva 2003). The initial plans for the shopping centre and a subway were altered in light of the discovery and the remains are now on display in a covered museum. The house lies at the foot of the hill leading up to the theatre (see below) and on the north side of a street running east to the eastern defences of the city past late Roman buildings, including a set of public baths, a synagogue and another house known as 'building Narcissus'. After the Gothic raids of AD 250, this part of the city had been reconstructed, the streets raised by one metre and repaved with syenite slabs. The streets continued in use with much rebuilding between them until the sixth century. The location of the house and the role of its owner(s) in the life of the late Roman city may be indicated by a newly built street running south and leading to the west entrance of the church known as the Great Basilica, thus providing a direct link between the two buildings. Three *insulae* lying in its

path were divided by this street into several smaller sections. The excavated part of the house forms the south wing of a courtyard arrangement with service rooms containing *dolii* (large earthenware storage vessels) at the west end. There were possibly shops in the unexcavated west wing. The eastern part of the wing contained the owner's living and reception rooms opening onto an internal courtyard with a peristyle. The house can therefore be compared with others of similar plan at *Marcianopolis* and *Abritis* (see below). At least seven rooms and the courtyard peristyle were decorated with elaborate polychrome mosaics of high quality, together with marble doorsteps and door frames. A large apsidal room abutted to the east end of the wing had a mosaic but this was almost completely destroyed. The highest quality mosaics were in the main reception room (room 3 – Fig. 3) and the peristyle. In room 1, on the west side of room 3, an entrance from the street led onto a mosaic panel with an inscription (partially destroyed by a later pit) reading ΔΗΧΗΔΕΠΙΟ.....ΕΜΟΙ C.... This naming of Desiderios suggests he was the person who ordered the mosaic and was the owner of the house. The mosaic in room 3 was divided into a number of elaborate geometric panels incorporating a large repertoire of devices and the use of *canthari* and borders of ivy scrolls. The mosaic also employed a large range of colours and the use of tiny *tesserae* (*opus vermiculatum*) and blue glass *tesserae* in the central female portrait bust in the main eastern panel. The room was entered from the peristyle where a visitor would first come to a marble octagonal water feature (which had incorporated a sculptured fish) set into and added to the pre-existing mosaic, and supplied directly by a water main from the city's water system and drained into the sewer system. In front of the octagon the mosaic had been altered to include a greeting inscription reading Καλωζ ηλθεζ Ευτυχωζ ('a beautiful



Fig. 4. Plovdiv (*Philippopolis/Trimontium*): Detail of the mosaic bust of EIPHNH – Irene – height 55 cm (see Fig. 3). Photo: courtesy of Mina Bospachieva.

welcome'). The two main panels of the mosaic feature central compartments with 'emblems'. The western panel has a *cantharus* in a circle, the eastern panel, a female bust in a hexagonal frame. The latter is of considerable interest (Fig. 4). The bust (55 cm high) is clearly a portrait of a person of distinction. Her head is slightly tilted to the right with a veil over her hair. The name EIPHNH, divided into two, is written in black Greek letters in a white band above her shoulders. The background is ochre but the head is set against another background of a circle (possibly a *nimbus*) of grey stripes. Her face is 'classical' with slightly parted lips, and her dress conforms with this style. Her hair is brown, parted in the middle and falling in plaits. Her veil is depicted in various shades of blue glass *tesserae*, indicating jewels, and is crowned with a diadem with a central white cross. She is dressed in a yellow *chiton* and a dark red *chimation*. The mosaic of room 3 is dated to the earliest construction phase of the late Roman house, when a glass furnace for making the blue *tesserae* was constructed in the courtyard. Two further phases involved the addition of further mosaics, the octagonal water feature and the apsidal room. Stylistically, parallels can be found at *Diocletianopolis*, Bulgaria, and in Greece and Asia Minor. The inscription EIPHNH (Irene – Peace) has been found in mosaics from Halicarnassus and Syria, but without portraits, and it has been suggested that the bust represents a personification of Peace or possibly the season of Spring, or simply the



Fig. 3. Plovdiv (*Philippopolis/Trimontium*): Roman town house with rooms surrounding a peristyle court, many with mosaic floors *in situ*. Here the largest room opening from the peristyle has a central water feature indicated by the marble lined octagonal void in the mosaic pavement. In the foreground the central panel of the mosaic design shows a female portrait with long hair and a bejewelled veil inscribed with the name: EIPHNH – Irene (see detail in Fig. 4). Photo: © Grahame Soffe.

pagan Irene, daughter of Themis, the goddess of the divine and natural order. A further suggestion has been that the bust may have a Christian inspiration, and room 3 could have functioned as a house-church, but without further evidence this would be difficult to prove, despite the mosaic being dated stratigraphically and on style and the palaeography of the inscription, to the late fourth century AD, when the Christian community in *Philippopolis* would have been substantial. The water feature and its inscription is dated about 30 years later and the inscription in room 1 to the fifth century on the basis of its parallel with the donor's inscription in the early church known as the Small Basilica. The building as a whole seems to have been destroyed in the seventh century.

The tour of *Philippopolis* also included the early Hellenistic walled acropolis on the hill of Nebet Tepe, within the later Roman walls, and the walls and towers of the fourth-century and later Byzantine city. This was followed by the magnificent Roman theatre, also a result of the early second-century rebuilding and utilising the natural topography. The theatre was built AD 108-114, according to an inscription from the frieze-architrave, with alterations in the Hadrianic and Severan periods. It was burned at the end of the fourth century. The marble seating of the theatre (now used for modern theatrical events) is placed directly on the hillside. It consists of two zones of 14 rows of seats each, and looks south across the main area of the Roman city towards the *agora*. The names of the ten *phylae* of the

city are beautifully carved in huge letters on the seats. The theatre would have held about 3,500 people. The stage building (*scaenae frons*) must have been a magnificent structure of three storeys decorated with many entrances, columns and statues. It is now partially reconstructed (Fig. 5). The theatre possesses a complicated system of underground vaulted passageways beneath the stage, orchestra and seating, and on the basis of this and other evidence of alterations, it has been suggested that at the beginning of the third century the theatre was adapted for the requirements of an amphitheatre arena (Vagalinski 2002).

Hissarya (*Diocletianopolis*)

The group then travelled 40km north to Hissarya (*Diocletianopolis*) to visit the famous Roman tomb and cemetery, accompanied by Radka Nankina, Curator of the Hissarya Archaeological Museum, and later the walls, gates, towers and barracks of the late Roman city and spa. The quadrilateral walled area covers c.30 hectares. The walls are protected by streams on all sides apart from the north where there is a double wall, and in fact, the town possesses the best-preserved late Roman – Byzantine walls in Bulgaria. Initially the walls were built probably in the late second century after the disastrous sacking of *Philippopolis* by the Goths in 250. The late Roman city seemed to have functioned as a spa utilizing natural hot mineral springs and two sets of baths survive, one built over by later Turkish baths. In the western part of the walled area an amphitheatre was constructed in a small valley

utilising the natural topography. Its walls are of similar construction to the town walls (*opus mixtum*) and encircle an unusual pear-shaped arena, 39 x 23.5m, and form vaulted entrances on the long axis to north and south with boxes over them, and four other box-shaped constructions on the east and west sides. The seating appears to have been of wood. The building is dated to the reign of Diocletian (284-305) and continued in use into the fourth century, contemporary with the much larger amphitheatre at *Serdica* (see below). A marble relief depicting acrobats was found nearby (Vagalinski 2002). Extensive cemeteries extend along the main roads out from the walled area, dating from the third to the sixth centuries. Several brick-vaulted family tombs have been found and the group visited a well-preserved fourth-century underground tomb. It has a rectangular vaulted chamber approached by stairs, with six niches in the walls and two funerary beds. Wall paintings imitate decorated drapery and there is a geometric floor mosaic with a geometric design in red, white and black. The walls of *Diocletianopolis* were extensively rebuilt in the late fourth to early fifth century, with further modifications in the Byzantine period, from which the remains of 11 churches have also been recorded. The curtain wall survives today to a height of 12m, in *opus mixtum* and multiple bonding courses of brick. There are at least 11 double staircases leading to the rampart walks and at least 43 rectangular tower bastions on the outer face of the wall. On the



Fig. 5. Plovdiv (*Philippopolis/Tripontium*): Theatre of the early second-century. View of the stage building, looking south. It has been reconstructed to show the surviving evidence of a monumental three-storey composition with Ionic columns and statues. On the stage can be seen a row of Roman statue-bases with interesting Greek inscriptions. They are from a fourth-century staircase built near the west *parascaenium* to connect the orchestra to the *pulpitum*, which was entirely made from re-used statue-bases.

Fig. 6. Hissarya (*Diocletianopolis*): The ceremonial south gate through which passed the road to *Philippopolis*, viewed from the exterior, now standing 14.5m high, showing the great outer arch, with the great outer brick arch, 12m wide surmounted by a tower containing a smaller arch. The great arch was originally flanked by square towers. Late fourth – early fifth century AD.

Photos: © Grahame Soffi

north side a greater concentration of towers are set inside the outer of the two walls. The corner towers were polygonal. The north, south and east gates are well preserved; the south gate most impressive today, meeting the road from *Philippopolis* (Fig. 6). It stands 14.5m high with a great brick outer arch 12m wide, above which is a second smaller arch originally set within a tower. The great arch was originally flanked by square towers and as the entrance narrows to project inside and align to the curtain wall, there are statue niches on either side.



Fig. 7. Kazanlak tomb: Vertical view of murals on the sloping walls of false vault of *dromos*, ht. 2.24m. Showing battle scenes, in which the deceased is participating. Forming two long compositions which can only be photographed in part since the chamber is very narrow (1.12m) at the base. One scene depicts an encounter between two armies, the other appears to be the ensuing battle. Brick and mortar walls, plastered and painted. Thracian tomb discovered in 1944. Early third century BC. Photo: © Grahame Soffe.

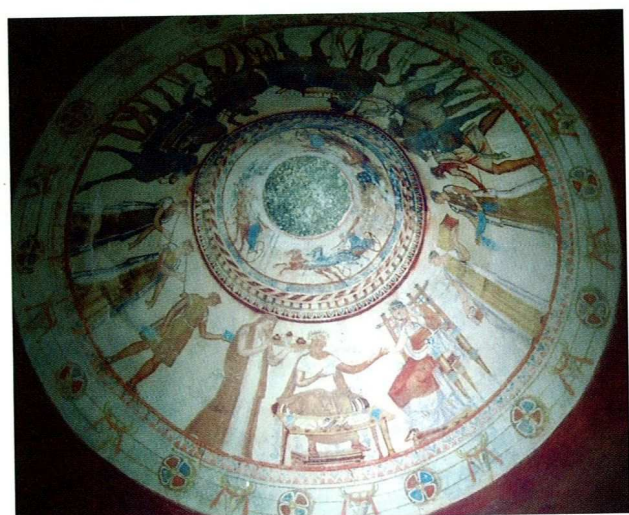


Fig. 8. Kazanlak tomb: Vertical view of the murals in the domed chamber, diam. 2.6m, ht. 3.2m. The murals divide into two friezes, one below the other. The lower frieze is the principal one. Beneath it, a border of alternating four-leafed clovers and ox skulls. Above these a Lesbian *cyma*. Over the main frieze four bands of decorative motifs, above them the second frieze with three galloping chariots separated by three columns. A large four-leafed clover in the middle of the dome is now badly damaged.

Photo: © Grahame Soffe.

Thracian tombs

The next venue was the area of ancient Thrace known today as the Valley of the Rosès and more recently, the Valley of the Thracian Rulers, because of the large number of enormous Thracian tumuli (*mogili*) containing temple-tombs archaeologically excavated or rescued from plundering since the discovery and excavation of the Kazanlak tomb in 1944. The Kazanlak Hotel in the town of Kazanlak provided accommodation for this stage of the tour. The

valley is traversed by the River Tundzha on which was situated *Seuthopolis*, the city of the Thracian King Seuthes III (early third century BC), the site now submerged beneath a reservoir (Dimitrov and Čičokova 1978). It also contains the more recent towns of Ottoman origin: Kazanlak, Muglzh, and to the north, Shipka, at the entrance to the Shipka Pass through the Balkan Mountains. Members of the group were privileged to visit (in small numbers over two days) the great Tomb of Kazanlak (early third century BC and not open to the public), together with the modern replica of the tomb built for public display, and the museum. The tomb contains the famous mural paintings, some of the finest, most important and earliest survivals of classical art known from antiquity (Figs. 7–10). When excavated in 1944 the brick tomb structures were found to be within a mound 7.2m high and 40m in diameter. The tomb

had been robbed in antiquity, but some objects remained, and the skeleton of a horse. These included traces of a wooden coffin, metal weapons and bridle fragments, gold buttons, rings and ribbon fragments, ceramic vessels – an amphora, an *askos* and an *oenochoe*. Also found was a silver wine jug with gold decoration, clay rosettes and beads and a coin of Seuthes III. The tomb was slightly damaged by tree growth and oozing rain water, so in 1960



Fig. 9. Kazanlak tomb: Centre-piece of main frieze in domed chamber. The deceased prince is seated on bed with covers, dressed in short-sleeved *chiton* and cloak, behind three-legged table laden with fruit and other food; he has a *kantharos* in one hand, and holds out his other to a woman dressed in long *peplos* and cloak, seated on richly decorated throne. Both wear gold wreaths; the woman wears a veil falling down her back. Both figures have footwear. The woman, with her elbow on the arm of the throne, which is decorated with a winged sphinx, has her hand drawn up to her chin in a pensive attitude. This couple, in whose honour the tomb was erected, were probably a prince and princess. Behind the man stands a woman bearing a dish of fruit. A veil covers her head and she wears a long sleeveless *chiton*, with a white panel down the front. Replica. Photo: © Grahame Soffe.



Fig. 10. Kazanlak tomb: Main frieze of domed chamber. Two female attendants stand behind the princess. The first holds a chest and jewel box. The second is carrying a blue veil. They are both dressed in long sleeveless *chita* with a yellow panel and held by a cord. They wear shoes, necklaces, ear-rings and bracelets. Behind them the deceased prince's chariot is depicted, drawn by four horses. All details of the horses' trappings are shown, as well as the bodywork and wheels of the chariot. The horses are depicted in various colours with legs in different attitudes. The charioteer, wearing a short white *chiton*, leaving one shoulder uncovered, holds a whip. His feet are bare. Replica.

Photo: © Grahame Soffe.

a new protective structure was built over it and an air conditioning system installed in 1961. Many studies of the paintings have been published (Zhivkova 1975), discussing their origin, style and date. Many have been concerned to ascertain whether there really was a Thracian school in Hellenistic decorative art. What is clear is that at the end of the fourth century BC Ancient Thrace and especially the Toundja region of the Odrysaeen state was a highly developed centre of the East Hellenistic culture of the Mediterranean, 'where there existed an original vanguard in art valid for the entire classical civilization...' (Zhivkova 1975).

There then followed a viewing of another major temple-tomb, the Ostrusha Tomb, near Shipka. The excavation of this tomb was a highlight of the series of investigations carried out by the Thracian Expedition for Tumular Investigations (TEMP) under the direction of Dr Georgi Kitov between 1992 and 1999. In 1993, the 20m-high mound, one of the largest tumuli in the region, was found to contain a tomb-and-cult complex of six chambers, dating from the fourth century BC. On the north side was a chamber in the form of a roofed temple carved from an enormous stone block weighing more than 60 tons. The ceiling is carved in high relief imitating an elaborate pattern of crossing joists dividing areas of painting. The central circular area depicting a yellow sun encrusted with gold was surrounded with



Fig. 11. Ostrusha tomb-and-cult complex: Ceiling of monolithic chamber, carved from a single block 2.5 x 3.5 x 2.5m. Detail of painted female portrait with remains of gold ear-rings and necklace. Fourth century BC.

Photo: © Grahame Soffe.

scenes of human and animal portraits and other ornament. This early use of gold encrustation has led to the paintings being plundered and the gold scraped off in the fourth century AD, 700 years later (Fig. 11). After visiting this tomb the group were joined by Hristo Zahariev of the History Museum Isfra (Kazanlak) who accompanied the group to the more recently excavated tomb in the Golyama (Greater) Kosmatka Tumulus. The mound itself is 20m in height and 90m in diameter, ranking among the largest in the Balkans. It is also similar to the tumuli of Ostrusha and Shoushmanets, both of which also contained temple-tombs. Excavation of the tomb was undertaken by Dr Georgi Kitov and



Fig. 12. Golyama Kosmatka temple-tomb, Tomb of Seuthes III: Restored left-hand (western) leaf of the marble door, in place. Sculpted decoration includes embossed nail-heads imitating wooded doors and a roundel containing the head of Dionysus-Zagreus. The right-hand leaf bore the head of Dyonyus-Sabasius, with sun rays radiating from it. The left-hand leaf had been painted black, the right-hand leaf, red. Height: 1.8m, scale: 40cm. Late fourth-early third century BC.

Photo: © Grahame Soffe.

his team in 2004 (Kitov 2005). He has dated the earliest phase of the monument to the mid fifth century BC. The temple-tomb consists of a long wide passage leading to three large chambers; rectangular, circular, and finally a rectangular chamber carved from a single granite block of 60 tons, covered with a separate triangular roofing block. The chamber contained a ritual bed and a series of sumptuous votive offerings belonging to a heroized, deified Thracian ruler, comparable to the objects found in the tomb of Philip II of Macedon, at Vergina, Greece (336 BC). Two leaves of a finely sculpted marble door which had originally been hinged at the entrance to the second chamber in its 'temple phase', were found broken up and used as blocking of entrances in the 'tomb' phase. They have now been restored to their original position (Fig. 12). The tomb has been identified as that of the Thracian King Seuthes III who lived in the late fourth century BC and died in the early third century. Outside the façade of the tomb a life-sized bronze head from a statue of the king had been buried in an upright position (Fig. 13).



Fig. 13. Golyama Kosmatka temple-tomb. Tomb of Seuthes III: Life-size bronze head of King Seuthes III with eyes of ivory and semi-precious stones, severed from a statue, possibly by the sculptor Lysippos and found buried and set upright at the entrance to the temple-tomb. Photographed soon after excavation in 2004 after field cleaning. Late fourth-early third century BC. National Museum of Archaeology, Sofia.

Photo: © Stefan Dimov.

Nessebar (*Mesembria Pontica*)

After a long journey to the Black Sea coast the group arrived at the ancient city of Nessebar (*Mesembria Pontica*), situated north of the Gulf of Bourgas. The earliest settled colony of the Thracian Bronze Age occupied a peninsula 850m long and 300m wide, linked to the mainland by an isthmus crossed now by a modern road. The peninsula is now heavily built up but there is a clear sequence of occupation through the Greco-Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine periods with fortifications belonging to all periods. Before the Roman period (from 72 BC) the peninsula was covered with brick houses and there is epigraphic evidence for an important temple to Apollo. Fine terracotta architectural ornaments and statues of this period are on display in the Nessebar Archaeological Museum (Fig. 14).

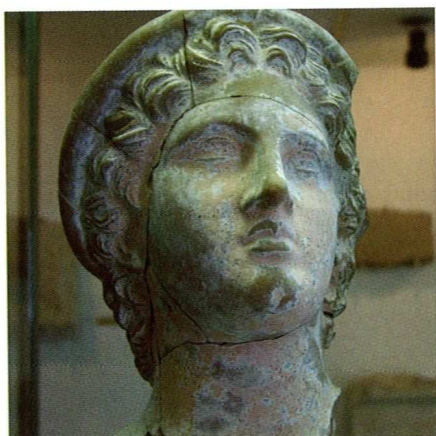


Fig. 14. Nessebar (*Mesembria Pontica*): Hellenistic terracotta female head broken from a statue. Just under life-size. Second century BC. Nessebar Archaeological Museum.
Photo: © Michael Grant de Longueuil.

An extensive cemetery with some rich tombs lies on the mainland coast. The Greek colony was encircled by a fortified wall but much of this has been eroded away. The surviving substantial walls, particularly at the entrance to the peninsula on the west, are of Late Roman or Early Byzantine date, probably from the fifth to sixth century AD, repaired from the seventh to the fourteenth centuries and excavated and conserved from 1958 to 1981 (Venedikov et al, 1969). The west gate survives today, flanked by pentagonal towers of rusticated ashlar blocks. The wall has a U-shaped tower of *opus mixtum* (similar to the walls of *Diocletianopolis*) with multiple

bonding courses of brick, butt-jointed to the wall and standing on a foundation that reveals its original rectangular plan. North of it is another large circular tower which defended the angle at the sea approach (Fig. 15). Two early Byzantine churches have been excavated near the shore, including the Sea Basilica. The most interesting early church, the Old Metropolis in the centre of the peninsular, is preserved to roof height (Fig. 16). The plan, consisting of a three-nave basilica, a single three-sided apse, a narthex and an atrium, indicates it to have been a late fifth-century church similar to St John Studios in Constantinople, with upper galleries over the side-naves, two storeys of nave columns and clerestory windows. It appears that this building was soon demolished in a raid or other disaster and rebuilt at present at the end of the fifth century with five pairs of massive *opus mixtum* piers. The group toured the fortifications and harbour, six further Byzantine churches of the later medieval period, the Byzantine baths and the Archaeological Museum.

Varna (*Odessos*)

The tour then moved north along the Black Sea coast to the great city of Varna (*Odessos*) where the group was based at the Odessos Hotel. The city was founded by the Greek cities of *Miletos* and *Megara* in c.580 BC, essentially as a Greek settlement and trading colony in Thracian territory, and it remained an important commercial centre and metropolis into the Roman period (Minchev 2011). It is clear from the collections of sculpture, architectural fragments, inscriptions and issues of coins from its own mint that the city reached a high level culturally, incorporating influences from a wide area. It was clearly a major religious centre and temples must have been numerous and rich. Important was the pre-Roman cult of the Thracian Horseman. This, and the funerary feast, can be seen represented on many stelae in the Varna Museum. Other important cults were that of Darzalas, sometimes syncretised with Serapis, and that of Cybele. Most of the



Fig. 15. Nessebar (*Mesembria Pontica*): Exterior view of the Early Byzantine fortifications just north of the west gate, looking north, showing two U-shaped towers using *opus mixtum* and ashlar construction techniques. Fifth to sixth centuries AD onwards.
Photo: © Grahame Soffe.



Fig. 16. Nessebar (*Mesembria Pontica*): Early Byzantine church known as the Old Metropolis. View east towards the apse. Late fifth century AD. Andrew Poulter in foreground.
Photo: © Grahame Soffe.

group's time was spent at the extensive complex of luxurious civic Roman baths which constitute the major archaeological site in Varna (Minchev 1970; Georgiev 1983). They are the best preserved in Bulgaria and the fourth largest Roman baths complex extant in the Roman Empire. The site was excavated under Milko Mirchev from 1959 to 1971 and it appears the baths were built soon after the middle of the second century AD, continuing in regular use to the end of the third. This date coincides with the construction in 157, by the then legate for *Moesia Inferior*, of a new aqueduct to meet the needs of the expanding population. The same legate set up an altar in the baths to Asclepius and Hygieina. The site occupies 7,000sq.m in the centre of



Fig. 17. Varna (Odessos): The Roman civic baths. The eastern apodyterium looking west towards the doors leading to the central frigidaria. Late second century AD.

Photo: © Grahame Soffe.



Fig. 18. Varna (Odessos): The Roman civic baths. The monolithic jambs and lintels of the door leading from the western apodyterium to the western tepidarium, looking south. Late second century AD.

Photo: © Grahame Soffe.

the modern city and the remains now stand in places to a height of 18m. The massive walls are built of well-cut stone with bands of brick, but many walls are entirely of brick. Many doorways remain still retaining their monolithic jambs and lintels (Figs. 17 and 18). The walls of rooms and pools were revetted with Proconnesian marble or covered with mosaic, and the two apodyteria were floored with *opus Alexandrinum*. Capitals, architraves and statue-pilasters were also part of the rich interior decoration. The plan was symmetrical and the main chambers were provided in pairs, perhaps to allow separate facilities for men and women. Two monumental entrances on the north led in each case to a vestibulum with access to a spacious indoor vaulted palaestra between them. This great hall was sumptuously decorated with statues, including Hercules and Nike, and mosaic decoration was used in the walls and vault. One fine Greek inscription on a stone pedestal for an over-lifesize bronze statue (early third century

AD), states that the ordo of *Odessos* set up the statue in honour of Claudius Aquilas, a civil magistrate who had financed and organised the Darzalayan games (Fig. 19). Each vestibulum also led into a large square and domed apodyterium. These led to two frigidaria or a frigidarium and tepidarium, with piscinae at either end. The warm rooms and two apsed tepidaria were at the south side on either side of a central tripartite caldarium. A vaulted gallery ran along the whole south wall, enclosing the praefurnium. A gallery also ran round the other three sides as an underground cryptoporticus supporting rows of shops and the latrines. The hypocaust systems consisted of vertical clay pipes 0.5m apart supporting the suspended floors with the usual columns of square pilae only used around the walls (Fig. 20). The group also visited the Varna Museum of History and Archaeology where it was met by the Museum Director, Dr Alexander Minchev (Fig. 21), who gave a lecture on the famous



Fig. 19. Varna (Odessos): The Roman civic baths. Inscribed stone pedestal for a bronze statue of Claudius Aquilas, civil magistrate of Odessos, originally set up in the palaestra hall of the baths. Early third century AD.

Photo: © Grahame Soffe.



Fig. 20. Varna (Odessos): The Roman civic baths. Hypocaust, showing the use of vertical clay pipes used in two interlocking sections to support the suspended floor and convey heat. Late second century AD.

Photo: © Michael Grant de Longueuil.



Fig. 21. Varna (Odessos): Dr Alexander Minchev, Director of the Varna Museum of History and Archaeology (left) with Prof. Andrew Poulter, in the museum gallery of funerary monuments.

Photo: © Grahame Soffe.

Chalcolithic burial groups, showed the fine displays of Hellenistic and Roman exhibits, and joined the group for the rest of the day.

Balchik (*Dionysopolis*)

The group travelled next to the coastal town of Balchik (*Dionysopolis*) where Radostina Encheva, Curator of Balchik History Museum, showed the group the current excavations of the Temple of Cybele and the display of sculpture and other material from the temple at the museum (Figs. 22 and 23). She was directing excavations with colleagues Igor Lazarenko and Elina Mircheva. This is a major discovery and the first such temple to be found in the Balkans. The discovery took place in April 2007 during the construction of a sea-side hotel. Work on the hotel development had been stopped by the local municipality so that archaeological work could continue. The temple appears to have been built originally c.280-260 BC and finally destroyed in c.AD 500 in a cataclysmic event. The lower parts of the well-constructed walls of the



Fig. 22. Balchik (Dionysopolis): Temple of Cybele. View of the excavation of the *cella* (8.5m square) of the temple at the time of the ARA visit, showing the ashlar masonry of the north wall in the foreground, behind it the *aedicule* inside the *cella* covered in polythene, and the south entrance to the *cella* in the background with the *pronaos* beyond.

Photo: © Grahame Soffe.



Fig. 23. Balchik (Dionysopolis): Temple of Cybele. Sculpture from the temple on display in Balchik History Museum, including a cult-statue of the goddess enthroned and the pediment with the relief of Helios.

Photo: © Grahame Soffe.

square *naos/cella* survived to a height of over 2m in a deep excavation under several metres of overburden. They are constructed of well dressed ashlar blocks with a plinth on the exterior (Fig. 22). The *cella* is 8.5m square externally with walls 1.5m thick, with the temple extending out about another 4m into the *pronaos* at the south-facing front. At the back of the *cella* is a three-stepped podium for an *aedicule* which originally had an Ionic façade with fluted columns, an entablature and a devotional inscription. Near this feature was found a triangular tympanum with a relief bust of the god Helios with a sun-ray crown and two horse heads on either side (Fig. 23). Perhaps he was syncretised with Cybele in some way. The *aedicule* also accommodated the cult statue, a marble bench with richly decorated legs (Fig. 23) and an inscription of the third century BC. In the middle

of the *cella*, floored with stone slabs linked with lead, a marble *luterion* was found and in front of it to the south, another podium, perhaps for a sacrificial altar. Secondary stone benches, 0.5m wide had been added to the interior east and west walls and inscriptions show that these were renewed by endowments. The front of the *cella* had an architectural façade with Ionic columns on either side of the entrance, with two friezes, each a single stone block, decorated with *bucrania* and rosettes joined with garlands. The temple was roofed originally with Corinthian tiles; these were gradually replaced during the Roman period with tiles of Laconian type. More than ten marble statues, most of the goddess Cybele (Fig. 23), have been found in the temple. In most she wears a long *chiton* and *himation* and is seated on a throne. She holds a tympanum in her left hand, and in four examples, a lion lies on her lap. In one statue, identified as the cult statue, she holds a vessel in her right hand and a lion sits on the right side of the throne. In the inscriptions Cybele is named *Meter theon Pontia* – ‘Sea Mother of the Gods’ and the temple is called the *Metreon*. This is a unique ascription. Other finds include a stone relief of ten dancing women wearing long garments, a font-like vessel decorated with two female figures, several bases in the form of dwarf columns, and two votive tablets of the Thracian Horseman, one with an inscription. There are twenty inscriptions, most in Greek, with the earliest from the third century BC. Seven belong to the Roman period, and one is in Latin on a silver statue-base re-erected to the emperor Licinius (AD 308-24) by the governor of Scythia province, Aurelius Speracianis. Several inscriptions are decrees which had been displayed in the temple. The longest is dedicated to the Thracian Mocaporis, appointed by King Remetalk I for a stratega. He supported *Dionysopolis* in war and peace against the “common enemies from beyond the River Danube.” There are also lists of priests and cult servants, not only to Cybele, but to Dionysus. From the Roman period there is a list of Thracian, Greek and Roman names of 84 members of a religious union who held a ceremony on the

first day of every month. Votive objects include 151 bronze coins dating from the fourth century BC to the late fourth century AD. Most are from the late period, the latest of Valens, AD 364-378, all burnt. There are also many pottery vessels, lamps, glass vessels and beads, bone needles, a bronze cone, mirrors and jewellery. The excavators have published an interesting paper (Rangelov, Mircheva, Lazarenko and Encheva 2008) putting forward arguments and scientific data to claim that the temple was destroyed in a cataclysm such as an earthquake and/or tsunami in about AD 500. This apparently caused a landslide which buried the temple in a deep deposit of material before the structure could be dismantled. Efforts are now being made to preserve and display the temple *in situ* but this is proving difficult due to a long-running dispute between the municipality, the landowner and the developers.

Kaliakra

The tour then continued to Kaliakra, again on the Black Sea coast, and here the group was joined by Dobri Dobrev of the History Museum at Kavarna (Fig. 24), who lectured on the cliff-top tombs, caves and iron mines, and the Byzantine fort, all of which were reached along cliff-top paths. Kaliakra, a long rocky cape and probably Strabo’s *Tirizis*, projects 2km into the Black Sea. It closes the wide bay at the south of which lies Varna. Three defensive walls of the fort have been found, the first of small dressed blocks belongs to the fourth or fifth century AD. It was 2.9m wide and had square and U-shaped projecting towers and



Fig. 24. Group with the ARA coach at Balchik. Left to right, Dobri Dobrev, Maria Radenkova, Grahame Soffe and Michael Grant de Longueuil; Todor Todor behind the wheel.

Photo: © Grahame Soffe.



Fig. 25. Kaliakra (?Tirizis): Byzantine cliff-top fort. Exterior of defensive wall of the second-phase fort, possibly built by Vitalian against the Emperor Anastasius in the early sixth century, showing one of five projecting rectangular towers facing inland. The seaward side of the fort has no surviving walls and probably used the natural defence of rising ground and the cliff edge. Scale 40cms. View looking south-east. Photo: © Grahame Soffe.

bastions which also flanked the single entrance. The second, attributable to the sixth century is similar in construction and may have been built by Vitalian who led a popular revolt against the emperor Anastasius at that time (Fig. 25). Vitalian captured *Odessos* and *Apollonia*. The third wall is medieval.

Marcianopolis (Reka Devnya)

Leaving Varna, the group travelled west to Reka Devnya, the site of the Roman city of *Marcianopolis*, founded by Trajan just within Thracia, after the Second Dacian War, which ended in 106. He named it after his sister Marciana. It became a major communications centre with a cosmopolitan population of Greeks and Romans. The fortified area, at 70 hectares, was much larger than *Odessos*, and it reached its peak of prosperity under the Severi when it was transferred from *Thracia* to become the capital of *Moesia Inferior*. It was besieged by the Goths in 248 and later became home to army veterans originally recruited from the region. Under Diocletian it became important again and was rebuilt in the late third and early fourth century. In the late 360s it was Valens's temporary headquarters against the Goths. It was also the site of an imperial munitions factory utilizing local iron ore from state-owned mines. The main excavated monument until recently has been the amphitheatre, one of the three known in Bulgaria, but only the foundation walls remain

(Tončeva 1981; Vagalinski 2002). It appears to date originally from the early third century and to have a capacity of about 5000, small compared with *Serdica* (see below). Three Christians were martyred there under Galerius (305-311) and a basilican church built on the arena under Justinian (527-565).

Between 1976 and 1986 a large town house, now known as the House of Antiope, filling a complete *insula*, was excavated by Dr Minchev of the Varna Museum (see above) assisted by P. Georgiev and A. Angelov (Minchev

2002). The surrounding streets were also excavated and shown to have been well constructed with a sophisticated system of water-supply pipes and drains running beneath them. The house was built in the late third or early fourth century AD on the site of an earlier second-century house of similar plan destroyed in the Gothic raids, and it was abandoned in the seventh century due to Avar and Slavic invasions. The earlier house had probably been owned by a wealthy citizen, Oulpius Gelos, known from a relief inscription. The house is 38m square in plan and was one-storied, apart from the two-storied south wing, and there were 21 rooms on the ground floor, surrounding an atrium. The atrium had a well and a peristyle with a Corinthian colonnade. There were six entrances from the surrounding streets. The main entrance on the east side was served by a marble sundial, and here, the street had gates at the ends of the *insula*. The functions of many rooms could be suggested from the wealth of finds within them. These include a stable, a kitchen, a wine cellar and a shop. Three large rooms with a total area of over 250sq.m were floored with figural mosaics of the highest quality utilising tesserae of 16 different colours, representing some of the finest mosaics in Eastern Europe. The group visited the site where the newly built Museum of Mosaics covers the western

part of the house, although the eastern wing and the atrium are not covered. Three of the mosaics are exhibited *in situ*, the others were moved, conserved and redisplayed in the museum. The floor of the *triclinium* (8 x 8m) on the north side of the house has a mosaic depicting a large circular 'Athena' shield with geometric design radiating from a very fine central Head of Medusa in a circular frame, known as a *gorgoneion* (Fig. 26). The shield's radiating design extends outwards in every direction as scales which increase in size as they recede from the centre. Each scale is made half by white tesserae and half by black ones, creating a psychedelic effect. Medusa's Head is a masterpiece in mosaic, made of tiny tesserae in various stones, coloured glasses and terracotta in *opus vermiculatum*. In the corners of the square panel around the shield exotic animals are depicted; a lion and lioness under a palm tree and a panther under an olive tree. Although Medusa's Head appears regularly in mosaics from all over the empire, this mosaic is a particularly exceptional and is closely paralleled with the well-known example found in the Via Imperiale, Rome, in 1939, now in the Museo Nazionale Romano (Aurigemma 1974, no. 295 (125532)). In another pair of rooms, the *oecus*, or reception hall and an adjoining room, possibly a *cubiculum* (5.6 x 4.4m), are a series of figurative panels, one depicting Zeus as a young satyr, kidnapping Antiope.



Fig. 26. Devnya (*Marcianopolis*): House of Antiope. Detail of mosaic depicting the head of Medusa. Late third – early fourth century AD. Photo: courtesy of Anastas Angelov, Museum of Mosaics, Devnya.

The design is accompanied by a unique inscription labelling the figures ΣΑΤΥΡΟΣ (satyr) and ΑΝΤΙΟΠΗ (Antiope) (Fig. 27). The panel was damaged by a hearth being constructed over it, as Dr Minchev points out, by 'a barbaric population during a later occupation of the room.' It is interesting that Antiope wears gold bracelets round her ankles, a form of adornment, more typical of depictions in North African mosaics. In the largest room (5.6 x 13.4m) another mosaic depicts the Rape of Ganymede by Zeus as an eagle. These scenes are supplemented with depictions of animals, including a lion, tiger and antelope, and a variety of bird species. The Seasons mosaic in a room of 8.6 x 7.8m, possibly a *tablinum*, on the east side of the house, has only 'Autumn' surviving damage, but includes other figurative depictions of a chicken pecking grapes, birds and pair of sandals. The construction of the modern museum building has been criticised; it is claimed that 90% of

the building's weight is carried by the Roman walls. As of 2008, visible cracks were threatening the building, which was also sinking due to ground-water.

Madara

The tour then turned its attention to Madara where members of the group were able to have a bird's-eye-view of the Roman villa at the foot of the great cliffs (Fig. 28). Here it was possible to compare the plan of this large rural villa (*villa rustica* or farm) with that of the urban house in *Marcianopolis*. Surprisingly there are certain similarities. It was built in the mid second century on earlier foundations, and sacked by the Goths in the mid third century. Rebuilt, it flourished until c.376 when it fell victim to the Visigoths, who, according to Ammianus Marcellinus, destroyed all the villas of the region. The house is 40m square in plan with about 40 rooms surrounding a peristyled courtyard containing a pool. Residential rooms with hypocausts and a reception hall lie on the west and north sides and probable baths on the east. Farm buildings and a wine press lay to the north. After the mid third century it was repaired and partly rebuilt, and surrounded by a substantial semi-fortified wall with angle towers and buttresses. After the Visigothic attack a bath house was built on the site of the villa at the end of the fourth or in the early fifth century and occupation continued into the sixth century. The great cliffs to the east which rise precipitously above the villa are surmounted by a plateau fort of early Byzantine date, similar to that at Kaliakra. At the foot of the cliffs the group also visited a great shallow cave which had served as a *nymphaeum* in the period from the fifth to the first century BC. Close by it a granary was found to contain 11 huge earthenware jars or *dolii* over 2m high. The group also examined the great Madara Horseman, carved in the rock-face about 100m up from the base of the cliff. Although the details are now very eroded it clearly represents a horseman whose mount is trampling a lion, with the assistance of a greyhound running behind. He holds the reins in one hand and a possibly a cup in the other. The carving is covered with Greek inscriptions and

the oldest appears to record a debt owed by Justinian II to Khan Tervel, suggesting the Bulgars carved the horseman in the eighth century AD. However, many scholars date it earlier and suggest it is a representation of the Thracian Horseman – the ancient nameless rider-god well known from Roman period votive tablets (first century BC to the fourth century AD) (Boteva 2011). Here at Madara, near the source of the River Madara, Thracian period plaques and statues honouring the Thracian Horseman, Dionysus, Cybele and three water-nymphs, have been found. Also a kilometre north of the Horseman, a temple of first to fourth-century date has been found, partially built and partially hewn from the rock. On excavation it was found to be associated with a quantity of votive material including glass and pottery vessels, broken dedicatory inscriptions, marble reliefs, and coins.

Abritus (Razgrad)

The group then journeyed to the extensive remains of the Roman fortress of *Abritus* at Razgrad, together with the Razgrad Regional Museum of History and the Abritus Archaeological Reserve and Open Air Lapidarium. *Abritus* is historically linked with the death of the emperor Trajan Decius (Fig. 29) who lost his life by being thrown from his horse and drowning in a swamp at the battle which took place nearby in 251. He and the Roman army had been pursuing the Goths on their way north from the sack of *Philippopolis*. The consequent defeat



Fig. 27. Devnya (Marcianopolis): House of Antiope. Detail of mosaic depicting Zeus disguised as a satyr kidnapping Antiope, inscribed ΣΑΤΥΡΟΣ (satyr) and ΑΝΤΙΟΠΗ (Antiope). Late third – early fourth century AD.

Photo: © V. Plugchiev, courtesy of Anastas Angelov, Museum of Mosaics, Devnya.



Fig. 28. Madara: Bird's eye view of the Roman villa from the Byzantine plateau fort at the summit of the great cliffs.

Photo: © Michael Grant de Longueuil.



Fig. 29. Razgrad (Abritus): Gold aureus of Trajan Decius (AD 249-251) found near Abritus where Decius died in battle against the Goths. Drjanovec hoard. Razgrad Regional Museum of History. Photo after Ivanov and Stojanov 1985.

of the Romans and the shameful terms accepted by their general (who followed as emperor), Trebonianus Gallus, suggest the probability that a mist of treachery as well as swamp surrounded the emperor's death. The massive circuit of excavated walls, enclosing about 10 hectares, date from the end of the third or early fourth century AD. The fortress is rectangular except on the east side, where the walls bow out in a curve as the ground falls steeply to the River Beli Lom, which also borders the north defences. The curtain wall survives up to 2m high and 2.4m thick in smooth rectangular light-grey stone blocks, larger outside than in, with a filling of rubble. In some sectors *opus mixtum* with brick bonding courses is used. The walls are estimated to have been 10m high. On the east side there are no gates and only one tower. There are large towers on each corner and 20 U-shaped tower bastions, each on a great plinth extending 10m out on the other three sides. The south wall, which needed the strongest defence, has two extra massive rectangular towers. The wall is indented at the south gate which has no towers of its own but is defended by two towers at a distance from it on either side of the re-entrant. Clay pipes running under the gate supplied the fortress with water from springs 5km away. These defences are similar to those at *Iatrus* and *Tropaeum Trajana*. The great north gate (Fig. 30) was

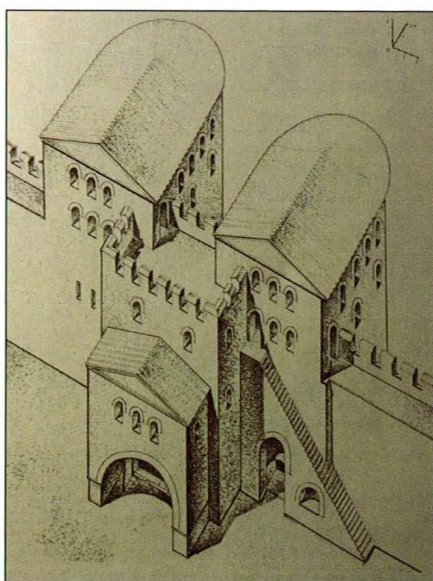


Fig. 30. Razgrad (Abritus): Reconstruction of the north gate, viewed from the interior of the fortress. Late third – early fourth century AD. Scale: 2m. Drawing after Ivanov and Stojanov 1985.

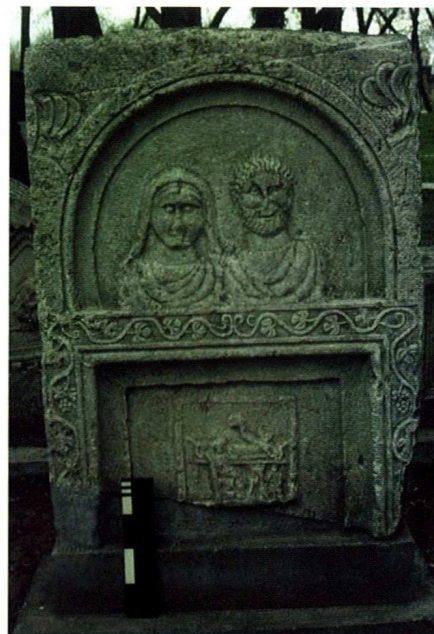


Fig. 31. Razgrad (Abritus): Tombstone with portraits of a husband and wife above a panel depicting the funerary feast. Inscription at the bottom missing. Second to third century AD. Scale: 40cm. Photo: © Grahame Soffe.

flanked by U-towers, and had a portcullis and inner wing gates. The west gate was of similar plan and had a number of unfinished tombstones used in its construction.

Relatively little is known about the layout of the interior of the fortress. A large stone buttressed granary stood just south of and inside the west gate, and east of the central area a large building usually interpreted as a town house has been excavated and laid out for public display. It has a large rectangular paved courtyard enclosed by a peristyle of re-used monolithic white marble columns with Ionic capitals, 5m high. The main (south) entrance was through a row of shops, part of the same building, behind the colonnade of the *decumanus maximus*. The private rooms on the north side were on either side a large rectangular apsed hall or audience chamber, with painted walls. This building, dating from the fourth century AD, stands on remains of second-century buildings. If this building was technically a house, it must have been one of the largest in the walled area when the fort had become a town. It has sometimes been described as the *peristilium*, and interpreted as the residence of the civil and/or military governor, but this is unproven. To the east of it are the remains of a sixth-century church. Presumably the *agora* lies in

the expected position in the middle of the walled area.

Abritus is surrounded by extensive cemeteries and large tumuli of the Roman period, testifying the wealth of the Thracian inhabitants. About 70 altars, tombstones and architectural fragments from the fortress and its cemeteries are preserved in the Lapidarium of the Archaeological Reserve. There are several tombstones with inscriptions in both Greek and Latin, evidence of the diverse ethnicity of the inhabitants, and with portraits of the deceased in relief, indicating a distinctive local style of sculpture (Fig. 31). The richly decorated architectural fragments provide tantalising evidence of public buildings of high quality. In 1921 labourers in a vineyard dug up 26 bronze votive plaques. Most show the figure of a Greco-Roman deity framed by columns and a gabled roof. But some display oriental cults. In three cases they show the horseman Sabazios, and seven examples have a female-bust with long hair and an elaborate mural crown (Cybele-Anahita-Ishtar?) (Fig. 32). If forearms are shown, they are raised with outstretched palms, like the Christian *orans* – an attitude of prayer. The plaques can be paralleled with clay versions elsewhere and may indicate a nearby sanctuary, probably dating to the second century AD, possibly the *Ara Decii*



Fig. 32. Razgrad (Abritus): Bronze votive plaque depicting a female deity, probably Cybele, wearing a mural crown and her palms outstretched in an attitude of prayer. Height: 19cm.

Photo after Ivanov and Stojanov 1985.

(Altar of Decius), where the emperor made many sacrifices on the night before the fatal battle.

Nicopolis ad Istrum

After leaving Razgrad the tour moved its headquarters to Veliko Turnovo, the historic stronghold which later developed into the capital of the second Bulgarian kingdom and is now one of Bulgaria's most interesting historic cities. The group was based at the Premier Hotel where Andrew Poulter gave a PowerPoint lecture on his excavations and survey work on the Roman city of *Nicopolis ad Istrum* (near Nikyup) as part of the British Expedition from 1985 to 1992 (see also Poulter 1995; 1999; 2002; 2007). He also discussed and illustrated this at the ARA Symposium at the British Museum, London, in November 2005 (see ARA 17, 52-55, 2006). The group visited the site accompanied by Dr Pavlinka Vladkova of the Veliko Turnovo Historical Museum and a specialist on the archaeology of the Roman city and surrounding area. The city has not been built over since the early Byzantine period and so the general outlines of its plan can be seen from the air, showing as the shadow marks of the ruins of collapsed buildings and earth-grown mounds of the *insulae* between the lines of the street-grid. In this way it can be compared with similarly preserved Roman cities in Britain such as *Verulamium* and *Calleva Atrebatum*, but the upstanding ruins at *Nicopolis* are more akin to the ancient cities of Greece and Asia Minor. This state of preservation therefore presents huge opportunities for future research on this site. Air photographs have enabled the basic plan, including the defences to be drawn up (see Fig. 8 on page 54 of ARA 17). The site lies 18km north of Veliko Turnovo at a major crossing point of routes to all directions (see Fig. 1). It was founded by Trajan in 102 in celebration of the Danubian battle which brought the first Dacian War to a victorious conclusion. The purpose was thus to restore prosperity to a fertile area devastated by the Dacian invasions. As the name implies it was colonised by Hellenised immigrants, mainly from the cities of *Nicaea* and *Nicomedia* in western Asia Minor,

who occupied the city and surrounding villas, and inscriptions show that the educated class was bilingual. This accounts for the rapidity with which the city developed a fully Roman agricultural economy in the early second century. The city lay on a plateau beside the River Rositsa. An area of 30 hectares was surrounded by a curtain wall, straight on each sides with angle towers, except on the north side where the eastern part curves on account of the topography. There are major gates on the north and west sides and remains of towers are visible on all sides except the south where the later fortified Byzantine city was appended to the circuit (see below). After a walk around the defences the main area examined by the group was the best preserved area of Roman civic buildings in the city centre, consisting of the *agora* and the collection of buildings on its west side (Figs. 33 and 34). These structures were excavated and conserved for public display in a campaign started by Prof. Ivanov in 1966, assisted by colleagues from the Institute of Archaeology, Sofia, and the Veliko Turnovo Historical Museum. The *agora* and its surrounding streets and public buildings were uncovered, including the *basilica* on the north side of the *agora* and the *bouleuterion* (council chamber) and *odeion* (small covered theatre) on the west side. There was also a large building opposite the south-east corner of the *agora*, probably the *thermoperipatos* mentioned in a building inscription (Ivanov and Ivanov 1994). Since 1985 the Bulgarian team under Prof. Slokoska continued this work, and also excavated the baths near the north curtain wall, a house, the east gate and part of the south curtain wall together with a defensive tower.

The *agora* is approached by the main streets, the *cardo maximus* and *decumanus maximus*, paved with huge stone slabs covering water-supply pipes and drains. These were laid out late in the reign of Trajan. The main water-supply came via an aqueduct from Mussina



Fig. 33. *Nicopolis ad Istrum*: The ARA group visiting the agora.

Photo: © Grahame Soffe



Fig. 34. *Nicopolis ad Istrum*: Surviving jambs and lintel of an entrance into the *bouleuterion* building from the *porticus* of the *agora*. Photo: © Grahame Soffe.

(26km away) and was gathered in a cistern west of the city. The *agora* (which seems to date mainly from the reign of Hadrian) surrounds a colonnaded portico 42m square, also paved with huge stone slabs. The portico stood several steps up (depending on the slope of the natural ground) from the courtyard with rows of monolithic columns with Ionic capitals of Hotnitsa limestone. The columns at the corners were heart-shaped in profile. Architectural fragments from all over the site have allowed a complete reconstruction of the main elements. Rows of shops on the east and south of the building faced inwards. On the north side of the *agora* was a long two-nave *stoa* divided by a middle row of pillars. Later, in the late third or early fourth century, it was transformed into a three-nave *basilica* divided by two rows of 10

pillars. The main entrance to the *agora* was on the west where the *decumanus maximus* leads up to the monumental entrance of a *propylaea* consisting of four Corinthian columns, 8m high, a coffered ceiling and a richly decorated and inscribed architrave. The Greek inscription shows it was erected by the city in honour of the imperial family in 145. The *propylaea* led to a small rectangular peristyle courtyard with six Ionic columns. On the north side of this was the *bouleuterion* or council chamber, with many inscriptions and architectural fragments, and the *odeion* or roofed theatre to seat about 400 spectators, lay on the south side of the peristyle and *propylaea*. Eleven more shops are tucked under the seating of the *odeion* and other rooms were built under the stage building. Filling further space north and west of the council chamber were two further long-naved buildings, each interpreted as an *aedes*. The whole design is very Hellenistic, similar to the *agora* of Messena. Some of the architectural fragments have interesting masons' signatures. The city's own issues of coins provide evidence for the existence of temples elsewhere in the city dedicated to Zeus, Apollo, Artemis, Concordia, Asclepius, Hades-Serapis, Homonoia and Fortuna, and these buildings have yet to be discovered, although there has been some work on a

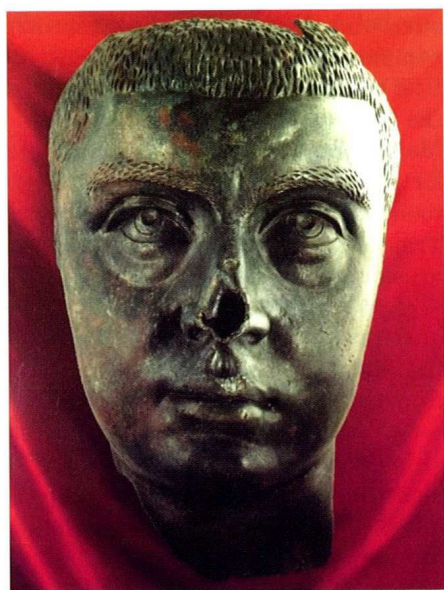


Fig. 35. *Nicopolis ad Istrum*: Head from a bronze statue of the emperor Gordian III (AD 238-44), who was probably murdered at the age of 19. Height 38cm. Found in the River Rositsa, north of the city. Photo: © Nicolay Genov.

possible temple of Cybele. Coins also, from Septimius Severus to Gordian III, depict a three-towered city gate. The earliest breach of the Danubian defences to the north of *Nicopolis* occurred during the reign of Gordian III (AD 238-44), so it is not surprising that the head from a bronze statue of that emperor (Haritonov 2002), who was probably murdered at the age of 19, was found in the River Rositsa, north of the city, possibly where it was dumped by a retreating looter (Fig. 35). The air-photographic evidence shows that apart from the public buildings, most of the *insulae* seem to contain very wealthy *atrium*-style houses like the one already discussed at *Marcianopolis*. Early in his reign Septimius Severus transferred the city and its territory from *Thracia* to *Moesia Inferior*, thus increasing its wealth and economy. His subsequent visit in 202 enabled the citizens to demonstrate their gratitude, and many inscriptions to the Severan family on statue-bases and elsewhere testify to his popularity. After a period of prosperity the Goths failed to take *Nicopolis* and *Novae* in 250 and so the city walls must have existed by this time. The city also survived the next 20 years but from 250 there was clearly a decline, although a brick public baths were erected in the early fourth century.

The later history of the city – what happened to the Roman city in the fourth and fifth centuries? – how was it changed by the Visigothic invasions? – were some of the questions the Anglo-Bulgarian programme of research, which commenced in 1985, was designed to answer. The work of the British team was concentrated on the fortified “annexe” of 5.7 hectares attached to the south side of the walled Roman city. The area was surrounded with the robbed-out defensive walls and a series of towers – those on the north side, following the line of the original Roman city south wall, faced north towards the former Roman city. It was soon realised that this area, which had never been excavated before,



Fig. 36. *Nicopolis ad Istrum*: Aerial view looking west, taken with a radio-controlled kite in 1987. The walled Roman city can be seen on the right with the street grid and *insulae* showing clearly. The light rectangular area in the centre is the excavated *agora* complex. The early Byzantine defended city can be seen to the left, light areas indicating the excavations. Photo: courtesy of Prof. Andrew Poulter.

post-dated the abandonment of Roman *Nicopolis* and that this was the site of the early Byzantine city. Initially a geophysical survey provided a remarkably convincing plan of the interior and this was used to select areas for open-plan excavation (Fig. 36). The late Roman city after several periods of great prosperity, was filled with large private houses, in marked contrast with the extra-mural area to the south later occupied by the Byzantine city, which contained a dense concentration of poorer housing. All this had eventually been destroyed by fire and then abandoned about the middle of the fifth century; a violent end, quite probably inflicted by the Huns of Attila. The walls of the new fortified city had been built by c.500, surrounded by towers and gates. These were examined in the excavations together with two basilican churches, workshops and a massive range of barrack-like store-buildings crossing the centre of the site. However, there was no street grid, no houses, no civic buildings,



Fig. 37. *Nicopolis ad Istrum*: Reconstruction painting of the early Byzantine city, c.AD 500, viewed from the south-east. The Roman city is behind the defensive wall in the background. Courtesy of Prof. Andrew Poulter.

indeed, some areas remained completely unoccupied. It seems that the sixth-century Byzantine city functioned as a military base and ecclesiastical centre for the bishopric – bishops are mentioned at *Nicopolis* in 458 and 518 (Fig. 37). Ordinary inhabitants lived in insubstantial mud-brick houses in the ruins of the Roman city to the north. Byzantine *Nicopolis* was radically different from its Roman predecessor. Evidence for the former large-scale grain cultivation was absent and it appears that there may have been a collapse in the region economy. To understand this, a new research initiative (from 1992) was designed for the British part of the team to look at settlement and economy in the hinterland. This involved the excavation of a type-site, another early Byzantine fortified settlement at Gradishte, near Dichin, containing fifth-century mud-brick buildings with suspended timber floors (see ARA 17). Meanwhile the Bulgarian team have been working on a regional field survey and the creation of a ‘sites and monuments record’, to record hundreds of rural sites, including villas, temples and pottery kilns. It seems that eventually *Nicopolis* was destroyed by the Avar invasions at the end of the sixth century and one suggestion is that the population seems to have gradually moved south to Veliko Turnovo, where the River Yantra twists through a deep gorge to create a chain of steep and well defended peninsulas – although this idea is disputed by some scholars. Veliko Turnovo was to become an important Byzantine city, as its remains of fortifications and basilican churches testify.

Dobri Dyal

The group then transferred to the second centre of Andrew Poulter’s current research and climbed to the summit of Dobri Dyal to discuss his proposed excavations of the Byzantine hill-fort. Traces of the stone fortifications were clearly seen close to the summit of the cone-shaped hill elevated above the undulating agricultural plain which today surrounds the site. The first season of excavation by the British team directed by Andrew Poulter (who divided the site with a Bulgarian team under

Dr V. Dinchev) took place in July and August 2010 (Poulter 2010). They were mainly concerned to ground survey the hill, carry out a geophysical survey and to investigate the defensive circuit of stone walls with buttresses whose existence had already been recognised. This was achieved with some success on a difficult and very steep and overgrown site, particularly as the defences had been constructed partly down-slope from the crest of the hill. Although a large number of coins were recovered, all were unstratified. They dated from the late second to the early fifth century. On the basis of the season’s work the defences were tentatively dated to the late fourth to early fifth century. No late Roman or Byzantine buildings were found in the areas excavated but an early medieval *grubenhaus* was found in area C within the defences, and the geophysical survey indicated that earlier buildings exist both inside and outside the fortifications. The results of the 2011 season are awaited.

Novae

From Dobri Dyal the group travelled north to Svishtov on the River Danube and the national border with Romania, to tour the extensive excavated remains of the Roman *Limes* fortress of *Novae*, and was met at the Novae Museum and Visitor Centre by its Director, Peti Donevski, who lectured on the site and conducted the tour with Andrew Poulter (Fig. 38). *Novae* is the best excavated legionary fortress in Bulgaria, mainly through the joint

efforts of teams of archaeologists from both Bulgaria and Poland. It is also a site where a group such as the ARA has the opportunity of examining the excavated and conserved remains. The fortress lies on the south bank of the Danube on the northern border of Bulgaria with Romania, just east of the modern town of Svishtov. In the late Roman period the fortress changed into a civil town and the main occupied area within the typical playing-card shaped defences was extended out to east and west. To the east the defensive walls themselves were extended out in a bow shape to enclose an additional area of about half the size of the original fortress. The site is located very strategically on the Danube opposite the Romanian plain, at the junction with a road leading to Constantinople and a route across the Balkans into Thrace (Fig. 1). The earliest fortress was manned by the *legio VII Augusta* which had been transferred to *Moesia* from *Pannonia* in c.AD 45. When this legion was transferred to Gaul its place was taken by *legio I Italica* in AD 69. According to Suetonius this legion was formed of Italian-born recruits and was intended by Nero as the core of an expeditionary force to be sent to the Caspian Gates of the Caucasus, all recruits being six feet tall. Nero called this legion the ‘phalanx of Alexander the Great’ (Suetonius, *Nero* 19). The fortress was initially surrounded by earth and timber ramparts and until the end of the first century, only the *principia* and the Flavian baths were of stone. Major rebuilding, during which the fortifications were replaced in stone, took place in the reigns of Nerva or Trajan. The defences surrounded an area of 18 hectares.

Novae is mentioned in many ancient sources and some flavour of the site and the region can be had from the record of Trajan’s victories over Dacia on his Column in Rome, although the fortress itself is not identified. In 250 the fortress was attacked by the Goths, but was rebuilt afterwards as a town, which became an important settlement and centre for glass production. It was raided again by the Goths in 376-8 and in 441 by the Huns. Inscriptions from the *principia* confirm that from this point it lost all military importance.



Fig. 38. *Novae*: Group at the Novae Museum. Left to right: Peti Donevski, Grahame Soffe, Pavlinka Vladkova and Andrew Poulter. Photo: © Grahame Soffe.

In the 480s, during the reign of the Byzantine emperor Zeno, it acted as a temporary residence of Theodoric. A semblance of prosperity returned in the reign of Justinian (527-65). During its long history *Novae* hosted major imperial visits from Trajan, Hadrian and Caracalla, and may have been the birthplace of the emperor Maximinus Thrax (235-8).

The present series of archaeological excavations began in 1960 when the site was selected jointly by Prof. Kazimierz Majewski (Warsaw University) and Dimitri Dimitrov (Institute of Archaeology of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Sofia). The site was divided into two sectors: the Polish team to work on the western sector – which included most of the legionary fortress, and the Bulgarian team the eastern sector, which included the extended area of the late Roman town to the east. In 1970 the Polish team agreed to share their work on the western sector with another team led by Prof. Stefan Parnicki-Pudelko from the Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan, Poland, working alternate seasons in rotation. After Prof. Dimitrov's death in 1975 the Bulgarian team was headed by Prof. Marija Čičikova, and then in 1987 by Prof. Aleksandra Milčeva. After Prof. Parnicki-Pudelko's death the work of the Poznan team was headed by Andrzej Biernacki. After Prof. Majewski's death the Warsaw University team was led by Prof. Ludwika Press and later by Prof. Piotr Dyczek.

This has meant that the walls and gates of the fortress were excavated under Prof. Parnicki-Pudelko (Poznan) and the *valetudinarium* (hospital) and Flavian baths by Prof. Dyczek (Warsaw). Other major excavations have included the tribunes' houses (E. Geņceva – Sofia), the second-century baths, the basilican cathedral and episcopal residence (Prof. Parnicki-Pudelko and later, Andrzej Biernacki – Poznan), the *principia* (Tadeusz Sarnowski – Warsaw) and the extra-mural villa under the *Novae* Museum (Pavlina Vladkova – Veliko Turnovo). The fragmentary legionary barracks west of the hospital, the water distribution system, workshops and houses, have also been examined.

Turning to individual parts of the legionary fortress (Fig. 39), the defences were the first area examined – the west gate of the fortress having proved to have been an impressive structure. At the end of the first century the original single passage was replaced by three arches flanked by two rectangular towers, both furnished with steps leading to the top of the walls. At the close of the third century the gate was rebuilt to provide two passages and in the reign of Anastasius, the towers projected further forward with an estimated height of 20m (Parnicki-Pudelko 1990). The first phase of the south gate (late first or early second century) had simple slightly projecting stone towers, on either side of two arched carriageways. Traces on the threshold indicate that the gate was closed with double-wing doors from the outside and two iron gates on the inside. A stone water conduit ran through the eastern passage. In phase 2 the towers were enlarged and in phase 3 the gate had one narrow passage with two U-shaped towers projecting considerably further out than before. The outer arch of the gate was eventually completely blocked. The later works were accompanied with the construction of a new line of U-shaped and square bastions around the defensive line. Re-used inscriptions and sculptured stones in the south gate, including a relief of the Rape of Europa, show that these final works were carried out at the end of the third or beginning of the fourth century AD.

The ruins of the tribunes' houses (*scamnum tribunorum*) lie between the *principia* and the *valetudinarium* (hospital). The Flavian baths, whose foundations lie beneath the hospital, were built to accommodate the newly arrived *legio I Italica*. Some floors were found to have been made of alternating strips of ceramic tiles and mosaic (*opus spicatum*). The walls were elaborately painted and the *apodyterium* was decorated with statues and a monumental fountain. After the construction of the hospital the baths were moved south to a new site on the west side of the *principia* (Fig. 39). Excavation was made difficult as the whole of this area is also overlain by the enormous early Christian basilican cathedral and episcopal residence (see below).

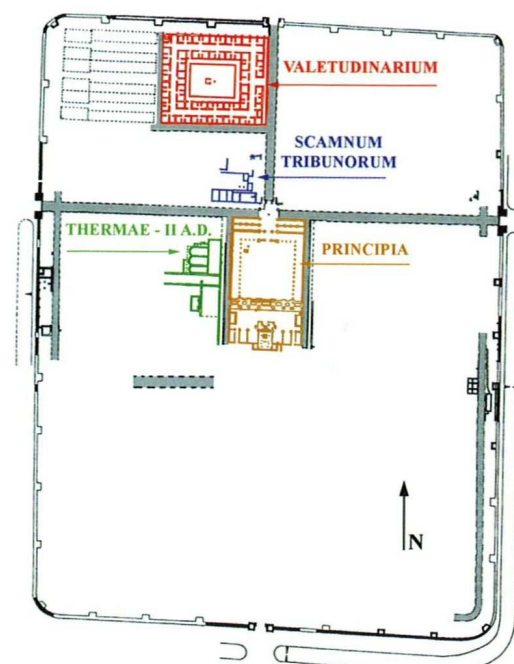


Fig. 39. *Novae*: Plan of the legionary fortress from the first to third centuries AD.

Courtesy of Prof. Piotr Dyczek.

The new baths consisted of at least a dozen rooms making up two complexes dating to the third quarter of the second century and the turn of the fourth century, taking up one *insula* of the fortress. The northern part consisted of three parallel rooms, the *caldarium*, *sudatorium* and *tepidarium*, communicating through a large rectangular *apodyterium*. North of the *caldarium* was a huge *praefurnium* which heated the *caldarium* and supplied hot water to two small bathing pools (*alvei*). Another room was a *frigidarium* with a rectangular swimming pool (*natatio*) situated in the south-east of the complex, and to the south, an impressively large *palaestra* or *basilica discoperta*, for rest and recreation. The swimming pool was furnished with stone seats and two sets of stairs leading into the water, and its bottom was covered with ceramic tiles. A series of drains and a massive sewer were found in this area. Objects found in the sewer date its use from the second to the early fourth century. A huge variety of ceramic building materials were used in the baths. Wall tiles were covered with elaborately painted plaster with ornamental plant motifs and the upper parts of walls had stucco cornices with Ionic *cymatia*. In the south-west area of the complex a room had elaborately constructed cavity walls using a rare type of



Fig. 40. Novae: Group of ceramic brick and tile products from the excavations of the Roman legionary fortress, including a box flue tile (*tubulum*), *imbrex*, bobbins and bricks stamped LEG I ITAL by the headquarters factory kilns of *Legio I Italica*. Second century AD or later. Square brick in middle 20cm sq. Novae Museum.

Photo: © Grahame Soffe.

tegula mammata (large flat bricks with three breast-like projections) and the use of pins and ceramic spacing bobbins (Fig. 40) between the wall tiles and bricks. A hypocaust of unique design had the usual brick *pilae* supporting unusual brick arches over which a thick floor (*suspensura*) was built. Another discovery was the remains of collapsed ceiling barrel vaults constructed of ribs made from interlocking ceramic *tubae* – hollow pipes (c.45cm long) of circular section with conical projections at one end, which fitted into each other and were mortared together. This type of roofing is known in Asia Minor, Syria and North Africa and dates from the end of the third or beginning of the fourth century, although the baths seem to have continued in use until c.AD 380. The evidence from the baths have led the Poznan team to study and publish the bricks and tiles from *Novae* in detail (Biernacki 2003; Matuszewska 2006). This has also included the tiles stamped with numerous versions of the legend LEG I ITAL, some depicting a ship and other decorations, or with suffixes such as ANT, suggesting a date, in this case of the early third century (Fig. 40). The legion must have had a very well organised brick and tile works – waiting to be discovered and excavated – for much of its history at this fortress.

The *valetudinarium* (hospital) is an enormous courtyard building of 82 x 73m, one of the largest and best preserved examples known, occupying nearly a quarter of the

western half of the *praetentura* (the area in front of the *principia*), just inside the north gate, close to the Danube (Fig. 41). It was erected at the very beginning of the second century – coinciding with the Dacian Wars – over the site of the dismantled baths. It functioned until the middle of the third century and the Gothic raids, after which the fortress gradually transformed into a town, the hospital was partially abandoned and a courtyard house (the ‘porticoed house’) was constructed over its south-west corner. This house had two courtyards, a bath suite, a glass workshop and a granary, and functioned until the sixth century AD. The layout and use of the hospital has been discussed in a recent article in *ARA News* 26 (Bithell 2011) to which readers are referred. The article also refers to Prof. Dyczek’s recent studies (Dyczek 1997; 2005) and is followed by Patricia Baker’s discussion of the continuing debate about the function of the buildings interpreted as military hospitals (Baker 2004; 2011). The room in the north-west corner of the hospital complex contained an extremely well-preserved latrine system, with its channels containing numerous broken artefacts. The good condition of the remains has led to extensive preservation work in an attempt to display them to the public. This project has also encouraged 3D modelling of parts of the site. Painted wall plaster and original floors have presented difficulties. Most of the hospital’s walls are still exposed to the elements, but conservation work has concentrated on the latrine and the *frigidarium* of the Flavian baths on the same site as the hospital. After a geological analysis of the original materials it was decided to carry out limited reconstruction on the preserved structures, at the same time making sure that the original and reconstructed elements could be clearly distinguished. The newly-built roof structures over the latrine and *frigidarium* were attempts at reproducing the appearance of the lost ancient roofs using modern materials. However, at the International



Fig. 41. Novae: View looking north-east across the remains of the *valetudinarium* within the Roman legionary fortress. The River Danube in the background.

Photo: © Grahame Soffe.

Frontiers of the Roman Empire Project Workshop held at *Novae* in May 2007 (less than a year before the ARA’s visit) it was shown that there would be major problems and continuous costs in displaying these features (Sommer, Dyczek, et al 2008; Picture Book in Breeze and Jilek 2008). As Prof. Dyczek has stated: “From generation to generation more and more restoration work has to be done as neither Roman nor modern walls with ‘open’ tops can be prepared in such a way to resist rain and shine permanently. Thus, the replacement of original parts (and evidence) piece by piece is inevitably resulting in all modern structures at some point.”

A small temple stood in the centre of the hospital courtyard (Fig. 42). The *cella* of only 2.46 x 2.6m was raised on a low podium with steps leading up to it. A low wooden screen between two columns guarded the entrance. A number of Latin inscriptions and one in Greek, were found around the temple. Most interesting is the cult altar to Asclepius dedicated by the legion.

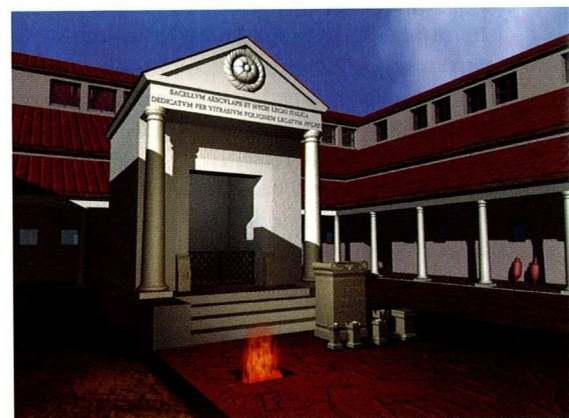


Fig. 42. Novae: Virtual reconstruction of the small temple in the courtyard of the *valetudinarium*. © CAR Novae, Warsaw University. Courtesy of Prof. Piotr Dyczek.

Two inscribed pedestals held silver statues of Asclepius and Hygieia, and there are two dedications by physicians. Dedications were also made to Juno and the Capitoline Triad. The area also contains tombstones moved there from an extra-mural cemetery. These provide important data on the origins of soldiers in the *legio I Italica*, such as Cuintus Vettius, who came from Cologne, Marcus Fonteius from *Arminium* in Italy and Gaius Aurelius from *Clunia* in Spain (but see below for the centurions).

The *principia* (headquarters building) stood in the centre of the fortress (Sarnowski 1991; 1999). It was a huge edifice, 106m long north-south, and 59.5m wide. It is dated initially to the Flavian period. On the north side stood a monumental gate structure supported on large rectangular piers. This faced onto the junction of the *decumanus maximus* and the *via praetoria* and was separated from it in the latest phases of the building by a bipartite cross-building running along the entire north side of the *principia*, thus creating a tripartite gate. The gate opened into a cambered courtyard surrounded on north, east and west sides by a colonnaded portico where only the bases of the columns have survived the extensive later robbing. Behind the east and west porticoes were long narrow spaces, perhaps serving as storerooms for weapons. An altar found nearby, dedicated to the *genius armamentaria*, had probably been set up by the keeper of the armoury. The courtyard also contained a large pedestal for an equestrian statue. The south side of the courtyard was occupied by a two-aisled cross-hall or basilica, 18m wide, with a row of arches and an inner gate in line with the main axis of the complex. South of this, and attached to the east and west side walls of the *principia*, were two tribunal chambers. The row of rooms on the south side of the *principia* and behind the basilica shared a monumental façade decorated with engaged Tuscan columns. The rooms formed a symmetrical arrangement, 9m deep, consisting of four rooms on each side of the central and much larger *aedes* (shrine of the standards). All interiors were painted red with white stucco mouldings and door

surrounds. A stone partition enclosed a rectangular area in front of the *aedes* and this was filled with pedestals for altars and statue-bases, and contained a small sunken bunker made of *tegulae* containing ashy deposits, probably from ritual banquets and sacrifices. The *aedes* projected back beyond the south wall of the *principia* together with two small treasury chambers (*aeraria*) on either side, thus emphasising the importance of these rooms. The entrance of the *aedes* was probably decorated with an elaborate architectural feature with vertical elements supporting a broken pediment. There is also evidence for a long marble frieze set up in the *aedes* bearing an inscription with imperial names referring to alterations to the building in late Antonine or Severan times. Another inscription from the building, now in Bucharest, is dated AD 200-211 and bears a wild boar (the symbol of the legion). Stratigraphic evidence points to a final destruction of the building in about 317, the time of the first war between Constantine and Licinius. Fragments of window glass and massive bronze straps found in the treasuries suggest windows secured with heavy grilles. These rooms also contained deposits of scrap metal. The remaining rooms on either side must have served as offices. The excavation has shown the interior

furnishing of the *aedes* to be of great interest. The floor was paved with large slabs and at the back was a wooden platform for mounting the legion's standards. Altars and images of deities and emperors (who had suffered *damnatio memoriae*) were found inside, including a very fine marble head of the emperor Caracalla (Sarnowski 1979) (Fig. 43). Hundreds of broken pieces of bronze scattered all over the floor and in the adjoining rooms were found to be fragments of military standards, cylindrical hinges used in mounting them, votive bronze mirrors, letters cut from sheet metal, fragments of fingers, robes and other parts of an equestrian statue. The *principia* and particularly the rooms running along its south side, made much use of ceramic building materials, bricks and tiles stamped with various versions of the legend *LEG I ITAL* (Fig. 40).

Two monumental inscriptions set up by senior military personnel in the *principia* deserve special mention. As our late President Dr Graham Webster pointed out (Webster 1969, 118-120), one of the remarkable features of the centurionate is the way in which officers were posted from legion to legion and province to province. He quotes the example of Petronius Fortunatus from Africa, who was posted to *legio I Italica* at *Novae*. After four years' service during which he was in turn *librarius*, *tesserarius*, *optio* and *signifer*, he became a centurion and was transferred to twelve other legions including *II Augusta* and *VI Victrix* in Britain, a total service of 46 years, receiving decorations in one of the Parthian campaigns, yet never reaching the senior ranks. The monumental inscriptions from the *principia* at *Novae* provide one example of a centurion who did climb the ladder of promotion and moved from legion to legion across the empire. It was found in the recent excavations in 1982 and is most interesting from a British viewpoint. It belonged to Lucius Maximius Gaetulicus, *primus pilus* (chief centurion) of *legio I Italica* (Fig. 44) who set up a statue of the goddess Victory in the year AD 184. The stone pedestal, which has the scars for the fixing of the feet of the statue on its top surface, is inscribed to the

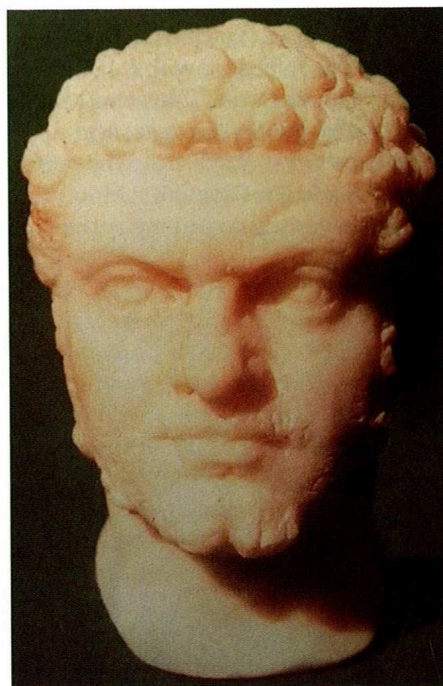


Fig. 43. *Novae*: Marble head of the emperor Caracalla (AD 211-17), height 12.5cm. Photo: courtesy of the Svishtov Historical Museum.



Fig. 44. *Novae*: Inscribed stone pedestal of a statue of Victory set up by L. Maximius Gaetulicus, *primus pilus* of *legio I Italica*, in AD 184. He had previously served as a centurion in Britain, setting up altars at the forts at Great Chesters on Hadrian's Wall and Newstead in Scotland. Height 77cm. Svishtov Historical Museum.

Photo: © Grahame Soffe.

health of the current emperor (Commodus) and in honour of the goddess Victory, who has the epithets 'most holy' and Augusta and Panthea – most venerated and embracing within her the personality of all the gods (Kolendo 1992, no. 27). Gaetulicus tells us in the inscription that he came from the town of Vienne on the Rhone, in *Gallia Narbonensis*. Marigold Norbye (pers. com.) suggests that his *cognomen*, Gaetulicus, is simply a family nickname, perhaps revealing a link with *Gaetulia* in Africa. Perhaps he had an ancestor who fought there (there is a well-known Gaetulicus, a general who did acquire that nickname for his victories in *Gaetulia* in AD 6 and whose son was prominent under Tiberius. Our Gaetulicus may have had links with this family). Gaetulicus tells us that he started his military career in 127 with *legio XX Valeria Victrix*. We know that this legion was, of course, in Britain (Jarrett 1968), and find that there, as a centurion, Gaetulicus set up two inscribed altars which remarkably are still with us today. One altar (RIB 1725) is from the fort at Great Chesters (*Aesica*) on Hadrian's Wall. This he dedicated to Jupiter Dolichenus. The other (RIB 2120), from the fort at Newstead (*Trimontium*) in Scotland,

he dedicated to Apollo. It seems amazing that he had given 57 years of military service when he set up the statue at *Novae* and must have been between 74 and 77 years of age. Certainly the setting up of a statue would attract more attention and be more expensive than an altar, and Gaetulicus chose to do this. His successors may have followed his example by erecting increasingly larger monuments. Indeed, the other inscription is on another statue pedestal set up in honour to Mars Victor (of the legion) and the emperor Elagabalus (218-22) by M. Valerius Flavianus, who also had become *primus pilus* (*ex equite Romano*) and originated from *Cirta* in Africa, although we do not know so much about his career (Kolendo 1992, no. 18). With regard to both Gaetulicus and Flavianus, it should be noted that the Bulgarian excavation team have located the house of the *primus pilus* on the east side of *principia*, together with other buildings of the first cohort.

Six early Christian basilican churches of the fifth to sixth century AD have so far been discovered at *Novae*. The Bulgarian team have excavated four. All have an apsed nave, two side aisles and a narthex. The first lies just within the former site of the east gate of the fortress. The second and third lie on top of one another above the remains of the tribunes' houses, immediately north of the *principia*. The fourth lies outside the defensive walls, 100m beyond the west gate. This contained four tombs, one in the apse, and a large cemetery outside it, to the north. According to the excavator, this church is plainly commemorative and the tomb in the apse held the body of the martyr St Luppos. The other churches have been excavated by the Polish team from Poznan and were visited by the ARA group. In the fifth century the area immediately west of the former *principia*, formerly occupied by the second-century legionary baths (destroyed in c.380), was chosen for the site of a huge basilican church (Parnicki-Pudelko 1995; Biernacki 2005). This was in fact a cathedral church, as we know of at least three bishops of *Novae* (Secundinus (448-9), Petrus (458) and Anonymus III (597)) all of whom were taken up with the political events of the time.

Five phases of construction have been recorded, from the early fifth to the late sixth century. The church was 46.3m long and 24.5m wide with its apse to the east, the largest church in the Balkans at that time. A trapezoid shaped courtyard (*atrium*) was laid out in front of the church. The church had a complicated history and was repeatedly altered, initially constructed with a nave and side aisles with an apse to the nave. There was a narthex between the west front of the church and the *atrium*, and a substantial baptistery was built in the *atrium*. The baptistery was a detached apsed building containing a marble *piscina* surrounded by a hexagonal superstructure intended for adult baptism by submersion. In the sixth century, the narthex was extended to north and south, apses were also added to the east ends of the side aisles, and an apsidal *martyrium* with an under-floor chamber was added to the east end of the south aisle apse. It has been suggested that a stone reliquary found here contained relics of St Simion Stylites the Older, a hermit who spent the last 30 years of his life (429-59) on the top of a huge 17m high column. The baptistery was also moved from the *atrium* to an internal position, at the east end of the south aisle, adjacent to the *martyrium*. It was an elaborate tetraconch structure of Syrian type (unique in Bulgaria), occupying the apse at the east end, possibly built after the earthquake of 557. The basilica was elaborately decorated with furnishings of Proconessian marble – altar screen, pulpit, and Corinthian colonnades with capitals. Liturgical chambers were also added and the presbytery was separated from the rest of the building. A three-aisled smaller basilican church with a stone reliquary under the altar was erected just north of the main church. It had a nave, two aisles and Ionic colonnades. In front of its apse, under its altar, was found a stone reliquary containing a piece of animal bone. The function of this church in relation to the larger cathedral church (it is only a sixth the size of the larger church), has been a matter of speculation. It is too small to have served in a twin-cathedral arrangement as at Trier

(Germany), *Aquileia* (Italy) or *Salona* (Dalmatia), and it has been suggested that it served initially as a *martyrium*, later to become a church for the use of catechumens (Kalinowski 1999). Surrounding the churches was a complex of chambers and corridors forming the episcopal residence or bishop's palace. One chamber north of the cathedral formed a monumental entrance hall with a roof supported on four columns. To the south of the cathedral church there was a spacious porticoed courtyard, running along the south side of which was a range of rooms, decreasing in size from the west, and connected with the church by an extension of the narthex in the form of a corridor. The western room contained the remains of two marble sigma-shaped *mensae* (tables), decorated with fighting animals, clearly for use in laying out food or in the liturgy of the mass (Biernacki and Klenina 2002, Biernacki 2005). Further to the east, another room containing ovens was in the fifth century used as a kitchen. Large numbers of waste pig bones were found associated with it. It has been suggested that this complex constituted a *ptochotrophium*, or shelter for the poor and pilgrims visiting the tomb of the martyr St Luppous. Erected in the 440s, it was rebuilt on at least one occasion, and was probably in use until the mid sixth century.

The visit to *Novae* also included the Svishtov Historical Museum where the Curator, Marin Marinov showed further material from the fortress including the Caracalla

head and the Gaetulicus inscribed statue pedestal (Figs. 43 and 44). On the return to Veliko Turnovo the group was joined by Ivan Tsurov, Director of the Veliko Turnovo Historical Museum and toured the old city, Tsarevets Fortress and cathedral area. Later, archaeologist Roumen Kolev put on a special *son et lumière* display at the Tsarevets Fortress. After this the group travelled to Arbanassi near Turnovo to visit the old town and the medieval Churches of the Nativity and St John with their famous wall paintings with local guides, eventually travelling to the last base for the tour, the Rodina Hotel at Sofia (*Serdica*).

Sofia (*Serdica*)

The Thracian settlement of *Serdica* became an official Roman administrative centre in AD 46. Trajan raised it to civic status with his family name – *Ulpia Serdica* in 106 after the Dacian Wars. *Serdica* also minted its own coinage: bronze (125-218, 260-8) and silver and gold (274-282, 296-311). After the invasion of the Costoboki in 170 the an area of 16 hectares – by no means the entire city – was defended by stone and brick walls 2.6m thick and 8m high, which were completed under Commodus. The walls surrounded a rectangular area, except at the north-west corner where they turn inwards to avoid a marshy area. The existing grid of streets and *insulae* buildings in their path were built over by the walls. The round towers at the corners probably rose 4m above the walls and the north and east gates have

been excavated. After the mid third-century Gothic invasion the defended area was expanded north and westwards to enclose an area four times the original size, the old and new walls being linked near the north gate. A large octagonal tower projected from the north-west angle and round and rectangular towers were constructed on the straight stretches. These walls are probably due to Constantine the Great (Fig. 45; see below). *Serdica* became the provincial capital of *Dacia Mediterranea* in the Diocese of East *Illyricum* under Diocletian. The city was intimately connected with the Tetrarchy, for Galerius (Fig. 46) had been born here. After May 305, Constantius became emperor in the west, with Britain, Gaul and Spain as his sphere, while Galerius effectively controlled the whole of the east from his base at *Serdica* and had ambitions to become sole emperor. For a century the city flourished and was one of Constantine's favourite places. Thus he enjoyed the winter of 316-7 in *Serdica*, and on March 1, after an imperial congress between Constantine and his colleague Licinius I (Fig. 47), their sons were officially recognised as Caesars. At some point in the early 320s he even considered *Serdica* as a possible site for the new imperial capital, before choosing Constantinople in 330. According to the fourth-century testimony of Eusebius, Constantine proclaimed of *Serdica* "this is my Rome". In 342/3 the city was the seat of the Church Council intended to heal the Arian Controversy, attended by some 170 bishops from across the



Fig. 45. Sofia (*Serdica*): Gold medallion of Constantine the Great. Mint of *Siscia*, AD 326-7. Wt. 6.81gm (= 1.5 *solidi*). Constantine, wearing a jewelled diadem, is shown with his eyes turned upwards. His biographer Eusebius interpreted this as an attitude of prayer, a reflection of Constantine's conversion to Christianity. The reverse shows the emperor with two captives. Photo: © Trustees of the British Museum.



Fig. 46. Sofia (*Serdica*): Gold aureus of the emperor Galerius, born near *Serdica*. Minted at *Serdica* AD 305-6. He took the name of Maximian when he became Augustus in 305. Photo: © Trustees of the British Museum.



Fig. 47. Sofia (Serdica): Gold aureus of Licinius I, Mint of Nicomedia, AD 321-2, with an unusual frontal portrait.

Photo: © Hirmer Verlag München.

empire. By the end of the fourth century the new walls were probably destroyed by the Visigoths and in 441-2 the city was sacked by Attila. After this the original second-century walls were repaired and in the sixth century given a new outer wall increasing their thickness to 5m. The old round towers were retained and triangular and pentagonal towers were added, especially on either side of the two gates. The ARA tour included an examination of the east gate with its two triangular towers; it has been imaginatively displayed by the modern city council and archaeological service in a pedestrian underpass.

Despite the whole early walled area being built up by centuries of occupation and the modern city, tantalising details are known of some of the larger and more public buildings, particularly of the late Roman period. The evidence for

temples is provided by archaeological and numismatic evidence. The city was the centre of a cult of Apollo the Healer. Coins from the *Serdica* mint show Apollo standing beside a fountain or in a temple. Excavations in the 1950s revealed a fountain within an architectural surround in the north of the walled area, dating to the second or third century. A gilded bronze life-size head of Apollo, doubtless from a cult statue, provides additional evidence (Fig. 48). Coins also indicate a temple of Asclepius (Bojkova 2002) and a possible *mithraeum* has been excavated in the west of the city. The site of the *forum*, 26m wide, has been established, and south of it a large building, probably the *praetorium* (governor's residence). To the east of these buildings an area of at least four *insulae* was taken up by a large walled complex. In the north-west corner was a small roofed theatre-like structure, originally built in the second century and rebuilt in the late third. This was either a *bouleuterion* (council chamber) or *odeion* (small roofed theatre); either interpretation is appropriate for the capital of a province.

Adjacent to and south of these buildings is a complex of brick-built buildings aligned west to east, including one building, now known as the St George Rotunda, remarkably standing today to its full height (Figs. 49 and 50); it was visited by the ARA group. This is Sofia's oldest standing monument and its use as a church, then as a mosque, and then again as a church

(St George of Capadoccia – eastern orthodox), has ensured its survival. In the early twentieth century, remarkable eleventh-century frescos were revealed – they had been covered over when the building was used as a mosque. Unfortunately, the rotunda now stands enclosed by the buildings of the President's Office and the Sheraton Hotel, both monuments of the megalomania of the Stalinist era. The rotunda is in fact the eastern part of the late-Roman complex which started at the west end as a row of earlier Roman shops facing onto

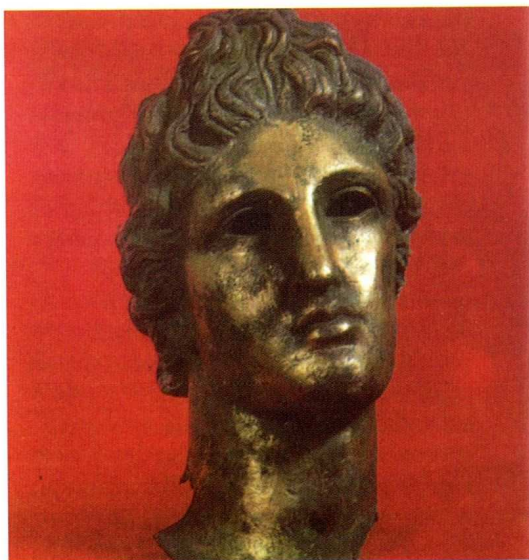


Fig. 48. Sofia (Serdica): Gilded bronze head of Apollo, probably from the cult statue of a temple, found outside the east gate. Ht. 38cm. Second century AD

Photo: © National Museum of Archaeology, Sofia
Courtesy of Prof. Rumen Ivanov

the *forum*. Major archaeological rescue excavations took place when the hotel was built in the early 1950s, revealing much of the complex of Roman buildings of which the rotunda was originally part. These are mostly now buried under the hotel (Ivanov and Bobchev 1964; Venedikov and Petrov 1964). The shops were replaced by an open court extending from the *forum* through double portals to a large outer hall, apsed to north and south, then down three steps into a narrower inner hall with corresponding square apses. From here another double entrance opened into a rectangular chamber in three parts with doors into the rotunda and, through its side compartments, into two rectangular apsed chambers flanking the rotunda and opening into it. The rotunda itself has a spherical dome under a conical roof, a large square eastern apse and four U-shaped apses between the cardinal points. The floors of the rotunda and its rectangular antechamber were built over a hypocaust which extends into the rectangular apse and two of the U-shaped apses of the rotunda. The north-east and south-east apses contained small *piscinae* supplied by water pipes which run through the hypocaust and drain through the walls to the exterior. Although not quite symmetrical, the design is clearly meant to be so. The main buildings are built entirely of brick. Interestingly, the original function and precise date of these buildings



Fig. 49. Sofia (Serdica): The 'St George' Rotunda (diam. 13m), part of the early fourth-century Constantinian imperial palace, standing to full height, seen from the east, showing five of its apses. Excavated remains of the same complex in the foreground.

Photo: public domain, Wikimedia Commons.

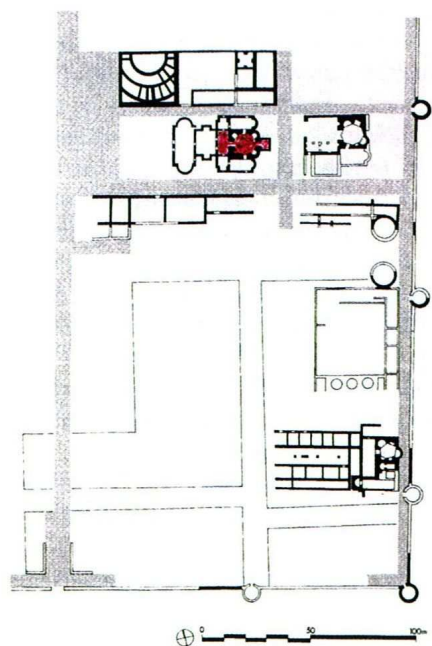


Fig. 50. Sofia (Serdica): Plan of the Constantinian imperial palace, showing the position of the St George Rotunda Complex (hypocaust in red) in relation to other palace buildings discovered so far. After Ćurčić, 2010.

remains a matter of debate, due to the lack of reliable stratigraphic and epigraphic evidence but Ralph Hoddinott presents a reasoned argument (Hoddinott 1975, 171-5) for both. The presence of a hypocaust had suggested baths to the first researcher, B. Filow, as also in the case of the octagonal building (but without hypocaust) only known from the floor plan in the fourth-century imperial residence at *Savaria* in *Pannonia* (Hungary), but this hypothesis has been rejected and the possibility that the rooms were heated as a precaution against excessive damp in this area of the city, particularly in freezing winters, seems more plausible. It is also not entirely certain whether the hypocaust is an original or secondary feature of the rotunda and adjacent rooms. The architecture clearly prevents its original use as a church, leaving the possibility of a *martyrium* for the tomb or relics of an anonymous early saint. However, this seems too prominent a site for such a purpose, as an early fourth-century date seems most likely for the complex, and there is no archaeological evidence for a tomb. The search for architectural parallels, where mausolea and baptisteries figure prominently, has led to the suggestion of a mausoleum/shrine to the pagan protector of the city. However, only a building of

exceptional importance would have been so associated with the *forum* and as Hoddinott has suggested, the whole complex was most likely erected as an imperial reception hall, part of a palace complex of the Constantinian period. On a parallel with the *aula palatina* in Trier (Gaul) and buildings in contemporary Ravenna (Italy) and Constantinople (König 2003), the emperor would have appeared from the square east room to greet envoys in the rotunda. The *piscinae* probably served as fountains supplied with warm mineral water via the hypocaust. The tradition of such imperial reception halls goes back to Nero's *Domus Aurea* (Golden House at Rome) and forward to the mid sixth-century *Chrysotriklinos* in Constantinople, or the octagonal building in the Tetrarchic palace in Thessalonica. The complex continues to the east up to the city wall, where another *insula* of brick buildings have been excavated and put on display. These include another circular chamber and a rectangular hall with a hypocaust (Fig. 49). Immediately to the south of the 'St George' complex, a peristyled courtyard enclosed by rooms, some circular and octagonal, decorated with mosaics and served by piped water and hypocausts, suggest an imperial residence, also of the Constantinian period (Fig. 50).

Just outside the east gate were two superimposed early churches and a baptistery. The first dated to the fourth century and the second with an apsed nave, two aisles, a narthex and *atrium*, to the following century. Beyond the gate the road to *Philippopolis* and Constantinople climbs a hill about 100m higher than the walled area of the city. The area on either side of the road became the main Early Byzantine necropolis and the top of the hill is marked by the church of the Holy Wisdom (*Sophia*), the fifth church to occupy the site, after which the city is now named, and the next venue for the ARA group. Alongside third-century pagan graves, Christian burials began to take place here in the early fourth century, concentrated around the first church of Holy Wisdom,

which, as will be made clear, was initially a *martyrium* and then probably the cemetery church. Some are wealthy tombs with painted vaults incorporating motifs such as birds, trees, poppies and lighted candles. The finest tomb was found in 1909; it was painted with busts of the four archangels named in Latin, a laurel wreath with fruit and a Latin cross.

Excavations beneath the present church of Holy Wisdom from 1893 onwards revealed that the first church on the site lies under the east end of the present church. It is only 14m long and 6m wide, and is dated by stratified coins to the early fourth century, presumably from the time of Constantine. The edifice was clearly a cemetery church and seems to have also developed from a *martyrium*. It had a single nave and a U-shaped apsed sanctuary at the east end. It was originally floored with a pebble mosaic, of which only the mortar base survives. This was replaced by mosaic floors of multicoloured designs, in three areas. The apse contained a mosaic depicting birds perched around a large silver fluted bowl with a basket on either side (Fig. 51). Plants spring from the bowl and baskets. These motifs are flanked by cypress-like trees and spiralling vines, all bordered in guilloche. This mosaic is now displayed in the National Museum of Archaeology. The mosaic in the eastern part of the nave forms a square divided into nine areas



Fig. 51. Sofia (Serdica): Church of Holy Wisdom, the early fourth-century mosaic floor in the eastern apse of the *martyrium* and first church on the site (width c.3.2m).

Photo: © National Museum of Archaeology, Sofia.
Courtesy of Prof. Rumen Ivanov.

containing motifs such as the vine, lambs, a *cantharus* and a peacock. At one stage this was walled off from the western part of the nave. It has been suggested that this was originally a separate building together with the apse, forming a *martyrium* with a tomb below the central panel of the mosaic. The excavation evidence is inconclusive on this point. The tomb has been dated from a silver reliquary and coins to the mid fourth century, when the mosaic floor above it was modified to incorporate a stone *mensa* (table) supported on four pillars (Boyadjiev 2003). In the western area of the nave a single border encloses the third area of mosaic, divided in two parts, the western with a complex geometric pattern with vases and birds, and a more schematic eastern part. This early hall church with its mosaic floors preserved relatively intact can be compared with the better known contemporary church whose foundations similarly lie beneath the present-day cathedral of *Aquileia* in *Venetia*. By the end of the fourth century the first church was replaced on the same site with longer basilican church built on the same foundations but with additional side aisles and a tripartite narthex, possibly continuing the use of the nave mosaics of the first church. A third church widened the aisles and narthex and incorporated new mosaics. The fourth church on the site, dated to the mid fifth century, had an enlarged narthex. Finally a fifth church on the site was considerably larger than its predecessors (46.5m long) with massive brick walls nearly 2m thick. It can be dated initially to the beginning of the sixth century. The plan is essentially Romanesque, consisting of a pentagonal apsed choir, a square crossing supporting a dome with north and south transepts, and a nave separated from side aisles by massive arched brick piers, five on each side, only 1.7m apart. At the west end a single chambered narthex had apsed towers at each end. Although much mutilated by alterations over the centuries the fifth church survives in most part today as an impressive edifice, 18m high.

The tour then turned its attention westwards, back along the main

imperial road towards the east gate of the Roman city. This was to view the recently discovered (2004) and excavated remains of *Serdica's* great late Roman amphitheatre, which we now know stood beside the road, only 300m outside the east gate (Velichkov 2009; Paunov 2008). Today, however, this site lies well inside the built-up area of modern Sofia and rescue excavations were carried out prior to the construction of a hotel, later named the Arena di *Serdica* Boutique Hotel, and an office building for the Bulgaria National Electric Co., in an area between the British Embassy and the Goethe Institute. The excavator, Dr Zharin Velichkov of the National Institute for Historical Monuments, Bulgaria, has written "no one believed at that time that such an enormous ancient structure could have lain undiscovered for centuries in the centre of Bulgaria's capital." The amphitheatre was found to be of typical oval plan with its long axis orientated east-west. The excavations started in 2004 with the examination of part of the circuit of the main structure of the arena wall and *cavea* (seating terraces) at the east end (Fig. 52). This was the site of the new hotel, which has now been built over the conserved remains so that they can be explored by modern visitors on the ground floor of the hotel with the upper floors of the modern building supported on tall columns. The ARA group were among the first visitors to the newly displayed remains. The other excavated area, on the site of the new office building site, also seen by the ARA group, included part of the arena wall and *cavea* at the opposite west end of the arena, together with part of the remains of another surprising discovery, a Roman theatre buried beneath the amphitheatre. Other parts of the structure are inaccessible to archaeology, but it is likely that the main entrance, tribunal and seating for high ranking officials on the south side of the amphitheatre are presently embedded in the hill on which the National Art Gallery (the former Royal Palace) stands. The arena was 60.5m long and 43m wide, similar in size to the Paris amphitheatre and not much smaller than the arena of the Colosseum. The height of the *cavea* is estimated

at 20-25m, seating c.20,000 spectators. It was therefore huge compared with Bulgaria's other Roman amphitheatres at *Diocletianopolis* and *Marcianopolis*, already mentioned.

Turning to the structural evidence, the main features at the east end (Fig. 52) were built of stone and large quantities of a type of large flat brick known as a *lydion*, many bearing animal and human footprints – a modified *opus mixtum* technique. The arena wall and the outer concentric walls were connected by straight radial walls, which formed the trapezoid sectors (*cunei*) of the building. A series of smaller walls with narrow doors linked these sectors, creating an oval underground corridor. The sectors were roofed with brick vaults. The walls were more or less 1.3m wide everywhere. The seating above was constructed of yellow sandstone. The east gate into the arena (later blocked) was 3m wide, being originally closed by a large two-leaf door. At the west end, excavated in 2005 and 2006, the west entrance (*vomitorium*) was found to be paved



Fig. 52. Sofia (*Serdica*): Amphitheatre: The excavated remains of the stone and brick (*opus mixtum*) arena wall (right) and the trapezoid sectors (*cunei*) formed by radiating walls and arches connecting the concentric walls of the substructure of the *cavea* (seating terraces) on the east side of the amphitheatre, viewed from the north. End of the third century AD.

Photo: © Dr Zharin Velichkov.

with large flagstones. The jambs of the arch, which would have been c.5m high, enclosed two-wing doors, the pivot-holes for which survived. Immediately to the north of the west gate were three massive granite blocks with vertical slots for pairs of sliding doors, presumably for letting the wild animals into the arena. To north and south other smaller gates were found leading into the arena. A large brick drain (0.4m square in section) was constructed beneath the arena floor from the east to the west gate. Among the animal bones recovered from the excavations, the presence of a bear, a camel, bulls, and a larger number of horses may relate to animals used in the arena for *venationes* (see the marble slab in the National Museum, below) and other spectacles.

Two phases of construction can be identified, helped by over 800 excavated coins and other artefacts. The amphitheatre was first constructed in the last years of the third century under Diocletian. During the second phase, dated to AD 324-330, in the reign of Constantine, the outer wall of the amphitheatre was strengthened by the addition of a further wall 0.9m thick. The other structures were reinforced with masses of pink mortar and refaced in stone blocks. The excavator suggests that in its final form the northern (unexplored) part of the *cavea* had a timber, rather than stone superstructure. The amphitheatre seems to have gone out of use by the end of the fourth century. Initially, flimsy houses were built in its ruins, and over the centuries the site has been robbed for building material.

In 2006 the remains of the earlier theatre were found under the west part of the arena, datable to the late second-early third century AD. The *orchestra* was found to be paved with river pebbles overlain with fine sand. A rectangular area enclosed by two parallel walls probably form a part of the stage building of the theatre which faced east towards the spectators. This building seems to have been destroyed soon after the middle of the third century, possibly by the Gothic invasion of 268. This situation was resolved during a battle near *Naissus* in September of that year, when a huge army led by Claudius II Gothicus defeated the

barbarians and killed 50,000 of them. The numerous corpses led to an outbreak of plague, which eventually took the life of the emperor himself in January 270. Thus, it is clear that the theatre was built as part of the policy of Roman urbanisation, and the amphitheatre corresponds with the period when *Serdica* was raised to the status of the capital of an imperial province.

The ARA tour came to a close after the group visited the magnificent exhibitions of the National Museum of Archaeology (Bulgarian Academy of Sciences Institute of Archaeology with Museum), Sofia, courtesy of its Director, Dr M Vaklinova. The museum was founded in 1892 and, since 1905 when its first exhibition opened, has occupied the former fifteenth-century Buyuk Mosque. Since then it has been expanded with additional buildings for exhibition space and administration. Although it was hard to avoid the Treasure Room with its exhibits from the Late Bronze Age to Late Antiquity, the group concentrate on the Roman and Byzantine exhibitions, highlights of which were the Roman portrait statues and busts, votive tablets from the sanctuary of Asclepius at Glava Panega, and the wall paintings and epitaphs from the necropolis of *Serdica*. In connection

with the amphitheatre just visited, one exhibit stood out for special notice. This was the unique marble slab carved in relief, depicting a variety of scenes in the amphitheatre arena (Fig. 53), and datable to the late third or early fourth century, contemporary with the amphitheatre. Found not far from the amphitheatre site in 1919, it was the first indication of the possible presence of the amphitheatre discovered nearly 90 years later. The curious scenes depicted on it include *venationes* (animal-fights in which beasts were pitted against each other or humans) with bears, bulls and a crocodile. Also shown is a garlanded platform with four possible actors wearing animal masks, two possibly acting as gladiators (a *retiarius* with trident and *secutor* with gladius), with an animal on a throne. A riding horseman wears a similar mask. To the left two men are possibly clashing cymbals beneath two panels on a pillar, possibly a façade of the amphitheatre, depicting images of Serapis and Venus. To the right a fighter seems to defend himself from a bear with a large cage-like shield. Zharin Velichkov, director of the amphitheatre excavations has proposed this curious carved stone to have been a notice advertising the events at the amphitheatre.



Fig. 53. Sofia (*Serdica*): Fragment of marble slab carved in relief, depicting a variety of scenes in the amphitheatre arena, including *venationes* (animal-fights in which beasts were pitted against each other or humans) and a theatrical performance (see text for details). Late third to early fourth century AD. Width: 77cm. National Museum of Archaeology, Sofia.

Photo: © Evgeni Paunov.

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